

"A NEW SCANDAL COMING SOON!"
HUMOUR AS A RESPONSE STRATEGY IN OATLY'S
CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Kriisiviestintää ja huumoria on erillisinä ilmiöinä tutkittu paljon (ks. esim. Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Sover, 2018). Kriisiviestintä organisaatioviestinnän osa-alueena liittyy kriisitilanteiden negatiivisiin heijastusvaikutuksiin organisaation toiminnoille, jolloin kriisiviestinnän tavoitteena on näiden uhkien rajaaminen. Huumori tyypillisesti nähdään kielellisenä ilmiönä, joka pyrkii mielihyvän ja naurun tuottamiseen. Kriisiviestinnän tutkimusta arvioidessa kuitenkin huomattiin, että huumorin hyödyntäminen kriisiviestinnän prosesseissa on ollut vähäistä (ks. esim Xiao ym., 2018).</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, millaisia huumorin keinoja ruotsalaisen kaurajuomavalmistajan <i>Oatlyn</i> kriisiviestinnässä esiintyy, ja miten huumoria tuotetaan niiden kautta. Tämä saavutettiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin sekä Bergerin (1993) huumorin luokittelujärjestelmän keinoin. Luokittelujärjestelmää laajennettiin alan muilla tutkimuksilla vastaamaan paremmin aineiston ilmiöihin, jolloin päädyttiin aineistolle kohdennettuihin luokkiin. Aineistona hyödynnettiin <i>F*ck Oatly</i>-nimistä verkkosivua, jossa <i>Oatly</i> vastaa sen kohtaamiin kriisitilanteisiin.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että huumoria esiintyy <i>Oatlyn</i> kriisiviestinnässä eri muodoissa, ja ne tuottavat huumoria monivivahteisesti. Aineistosta tunnistettiin kuusi (6) kielellistä huumorin keinoa: Epäsuorat viittaukset, määritelmät, leikkisyys, sanaleikki, loukkaukset, sekä itsensä vähätteleminen. Suuri osa huumorista nojasi inkongruenssi- ja ylemmyysteorioihin, jolloin sitä tuotettiin ristiriitaisuuden sekä ylemmydentunteen kautta. Huumoria tehostettiin myös Bergerin (1993) muiden huumorin kategorioiden keinoja yhdistelemällä, jolloin kielellisten keinojen lisäksi myös huumoriin ideoiden tasolla, sekä eksistentiaalisuuteen. Tutkimuksen tulokset laajentavat tietoa kriisiviestinnän tavoista, huumorin muodoista, sekä vahvistavat aikaisemman tutkimuksen näkemystä <i>Oatlyn</i> persoonallisesta viestintätavasta (ks. esim. Swain, 2023). Lisäksi se tarjoaa viitekehyksen huumorin keinojen tutkimiseen kriisiviestinnässä, kun aihetta on yksittäisten keinojen tunnistamisen sijaan aikaisemmin tutkittu valtaosin muun muassa organisaation maineenhallinnan pohjalta (Hämpeke ym., 2022).</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

When trying to understand what kinds of phenomena can be interpreted as humorous, one will encounter a variety of definitions and multiple, personal experiences and opinions on the theme. In general, however, humour is often linked to psychological responses and characterizations such as the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is experienced as funny, and the tendency to laugh (Warren & McGraw, 2016, p. 407). Although humour is defined partly through these characteristics by other scholars as well, including Chiaro (2017) and Berger (1997), for instance, it is not the only stance that the present study is applying, but it is additionally aiming to expand the understanding of the phenomenon. These conceptualizations of humour, when combined with organizational crises as unexpected and threatening events (Sellnow, 2013, pp. 5-6) with their potential of having direct, negative impacts on organizational performance (Odunlami et al., 2020, pp. 324-325) set up the purpose of the thesis. How would an organization apply humour as a response strategy in their crisis communication processes, with their purpose of preparing for, reducing, and limiting the threats and harms of a crisis event (Sellnow, 2013, p. 13)? This present study is aiming to add to the understanding as well as fill the research gap within this field.

While crisis communication and humour studies as their own, distinct disciplines, would lead one to versatile, fruitful topics in need for new research, my aim is to find out how the two of them would work together, and therefore explore a new direction of research in both fields. Humour, as its own phenomenon, has been widely studied by previous researchers. This point has been justified by Meyer (2000, p. 310), according to whom the compelling power of humour has been a recurrent topic for research within various disciplines, including communication.

However, there is little research focusing on humour in the processes of crisis communication. Most of the existing research in the field has focused on the expression of negative emotions, e.g., shame and regret in crisis communication. It has been found

that emotionally framed crisis responses elicit an emotional response in their audiences and minimize damages in reputation, compared to those responses with a rather rational tone (Xiao et al., 2018, p. 249). On the contrary, the expression of positive emotions in crisis communication has mostly remained unexplored to this day (Xiao et al., 2018, p. 249). My study will take a new turn in the discipline by exploring the use of positive emotions in times of crisis. During my studies in university, I have always been interested in themes of corporate communication and particularly crisis communication and -management, as well as learning more about them. Therefore, I find it important to fill a gap in both humour studies and crisis communication with my own expertise in those disciplines.

The overall aim of the study is to analyze how different techniques of humour manifest, and how the humoristic effect is constructed through these techniques on *Oatly's* campaign website, *F*ck Oatly* (<https://fckoatly.com/>), with its focus on organizational crisis communication. The strong opinions of the company and their distinct communication style (Oatly Who? n.d.) was the reason behind the selection of Oatly as the organization in focus in the thesis, but also the nature of the website as it provides a variety of data and interesting aspects to be analyzed in relation to the topic of the study. Applying the typology of humour put together by Berger (1993) and by broadening the glossary where necessary to achieve a full understanding of the humour applied in the crisis communication campaign by Oatly, the aim of the study is to unfold both what kind of humour manifests in crisis communication. In addition, it aims to answer the question of how the humoristic reaction in the target audience can be achieved through the use of these devices. The exploration of the humoristic techniques applied is attained utilizing the principles of qualitative content analysis, in addition to the developed typology for the purposes of the study. In the analysis, sections of the website are allocated to categories based on the dominant humoristic techniques that they represent. Then, the techniques are described and interpreted in more detail as suggested by Schreier (2012, p. 1) in relation to the humour that they create.

Referring to the study by González-Herrero and Smith (2008, pp. 143-144), the internet has radically changed how businesses and communications are managed in the contemporary world, in contrast to how these processes have been managed decades ago. Simultaneously, the internet has evolved into an environment that is widely used in communication with customers, employees, the media, and other stakeholders that are of high importance to an organization, transforming the practices of public relations and corporate communication and their professionals, too. This also applies to the practice of crisis communication (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008, p. 143). The study by González-Herrero and Smith (2008, p. 144) states, however, that little has been concluded about the differences in the tones, language, and attitude that companies must use within the internet-based environment today, and how a crisis plan considering the nature of today's virtual business landscape can be prepared. These points have been justified in recent research, too, where the research by Bajaj et al. (2014, p. 378) pointed out that, due to the increasing role of the internet and digital media, organizations have started applying these environments in their crisis situations. Bajaj et al. (2014, p. 378) additionally state that barely any research exists on how media technologies are leveraged to communicate in times of crisis. This adds to the point by González-Herrero and Smith (2008, p. 144) about the lack of research on the language organizations need to use on the internet-based environment and in crisis communication practices.

The aforementioned claims about little research on humour and in the language applied in business communication processes on the internet, as well as their connections to crisis communication, back up the need for the present study. The purpose of the thesis is both to fill the research gap in what forms of humour are applied in the crisis communication processes and crisis responses of an organization, and how this form of language is applied on the internet, specifically in the genre of websites.

2 CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

2.1 Introducing corporate communication and public relations

Although corporate communication and public relations might be seen to go hand in hand in terms of their definitions, they have slight differences. In short, corporate communication covers all communication between an organization and its audience, where public relations can be defined as a more precise concept within this area that occurs within the media environment (Rodríguez-Salcedo & Watson, 2021, pp. 23-24). The purpose of the following paragraphs is to define the two concepts, as well as the main differences and similarities between them.

According to Cornelissen (2017, pp. 4-5), the concept of *corporate communication* has developed from the function of *public relations*, a concept covered in more detail later in the chapter. Until the 1970s, practitioners of corporate communication had exploited the concept of public relations to define communication by the organization with its *stakeholders*. A stakeholder, in short, can be anyone that plays a part in the success of an organization: Someone who is either influenced by, or influences the functions of the organization, or both. These can include interest groups such as customers, vendors, employees, and executives (Goodman, 1994, p. 12). However, when other internal and external stakeholders, such as employees and customers, began demanding more transparent communication by organizations, the concept of public relations started requiring an expansion. According to Cornelissen (2017, p. 5), this moment marks the beginning of the development of corporate communication as a separate concept within the field of business. Overall, corporate communication can be understood as an umbrella concept and a function of management, offering a comprehensive framework to cover the effective coordination of all internal and external communication: The purpose of corporate communication can be framed with its overall

purpose of building and maintaining positive reputations with all stakeholder groups that the organization is dependent on (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 5.).

In short, according to Rodríguez-Salcedo and Watson (2021, pp. 23-24) public relations is defined as an activity focusing on planned communication and relationship building in corporate communications. Public relations focus on creating awareness, understanding, and engagement among stakeholders. It occurs through two-way activities with the stakeholders and the public, transmitted through the media environment (Rodríguez-Salcedo & Watson, 2021, pp. 23-24). As corporate communication acts as an umbrella concept to cover all communication with internal and external stakeholders of an organization, public relations, from a post-structuralist view, can be identified as an organizing function rather than a purely organizational function. Hence, public relations is a force having an impact on opinions, behaviors, cultures, ways of thinking, and societal norms. This definition of the concept allows a fluid understanding of its impacts on publics, societies and cultures, instead of solely focusing on its organizational functions (Valentini, 2021, p. 7).

In addition, public relations is crucially linked to the concept of *media relations* which, in short, entails systematic, planned, and mutually beneficial relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists, and with other individuals and groups who work for and in the media industry (Tsetsura, 2021, p. 141). Therefore, public relations differs from the term of corporate communication also in a sense that it is more centrally linked to the media environment, where expanding the media coverage and assuring that this coverage is error-free, favorable, and timely plays a central role (Tsetsura, 2021, p. 144).

2.2 Public relations as reputation management

The focus of the present study is on crisis situations that might embarrass the organization as a whole, followed by intense investigation of the credibility and decency of

its operations, having direct impacts on organizational performance (Odunlami et al., 2020, pp. 324-325). Therefore, it is crucial to cover how public relations and the topic of the study link with reputation management. As crises have the probability to embarrass an organization as well as its actions and have crucial impacts on credibility, it can be inferred that the reputation of the organization might simultaneously be affected in the process.

Among the central functions and daily activities of public relations, image- and reputation management fall into these central activities, with their role of representing one of the starting points for constructing and impacting the opinions and behaviors of an organization's stakeholders (Murtarelli et al., 2021, p. 175). According to Langham (2018, p. 1), reputation can be understood by a common vision about what an organization does: What it is, produces, and how it behaves. An organizational reputation does not belong to an organization in a sense, but to others. This is since reputation consists of what others say an organization is, and it is not for the organization to control (Langham, 2018, p. 1).

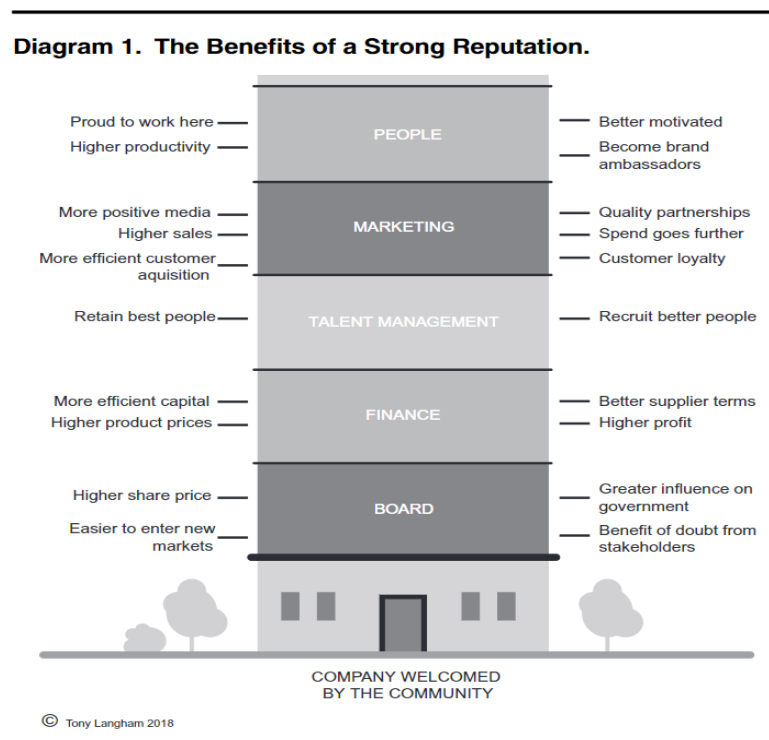


Figure 1: The Benefits of a Strong Reputation (Langham 2018, p. 32).

Figure 1 (Langham, 2018, p. 32) above presents some of the main benefits of a strong, organizational reputation. Reputation can be seen as a valuable, strategic asset for organizations, defining the degree of trust that their stakeholders, as well as the entire industry an organization falls under, hold for their operations and the brand (Langham, 2018, p. 9). According to Langham (2018, p. 9), from the perspective of crisis communication and events of crisis, a strong reputation is valuable in ensuring public support and is one of the most crucial aspects that a company can build and hold. The more comprehensive benefits of a strong reputation of an organization can be seen in the figure above (Langham, 2018, p. 32).

2.3 Understanding what a crisis is

As the occurrence and management of crises are topics covered within various disciplines, scholars have been debating over various definitions of them, and which occurrences and unexpected events for an organization within a society can be understood as a crisis (Sellnow, 2013, p. 4). What comes to the multiple definitions, FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management Agency* of the US) has applied distinct criteria on the qualification of an occurrence as a crisis or disaster.

FEMA DISASTER DECLARATION CRITERIA

- Amount and type of damage (number of homes destroyed or with major damage);
- Impact on the infrastructure of affected areas or critical facilities;
- Imminent threats to public health and safety;
- Impacts to essential government services and functions;
- Unique capability of federal government;
- Dispersion or concentration of damage;
- Level of insurance coverage in place for homeowners and public facilities;
- Assistance available from other sources (federal, state, local, voluntary organizations);
- State and local resource commitments from previous, undeclared events; and
- Frequency of disaster events over recent period of time

(Sellnow 2013, p. 5)

Figure 2: FEMA Disaster Declaration Criteria (Sellnow 2013, p. 5)

These criteria formed by FEMA, as presented in the table above, cover aspects such as the amount and kind of damage caused by an event, including the number of homes destroyed, threats to public health, safety, and concentration, as well as dispersion of damage (Sellnow, 2013, p. 5). Taking a critical look at the criteria as the base for an event to be defined as a crisis or as classified by FEMA (2011), a disaster, the event is required to cause significant damage on certain fields such as the environment, the politics, the public health, and safety. These criteria could be said to appear seemingly general and relate to the crises faced by societies, for instance, whereas the focus of the present study is more on *organizational crises*. However, to understand what is meant by organizational crises, it is first important to define the characteristics often applied in the general definitions of crises and disasters, although organizational crises might offer a slightly different perspective on them.

Crises, from an organizational point of view, are unanticipated events in the existence and processes of an organization, involving a widespread threat that violates the general assumptions and expectations that both the organization and the publics might hold (Sellnow, 2013, pp. 5-6). It entails an unexpected development of an organization that might embarrass the organization as a whole and is followed by intense investigation of the credibility and decency of its operation. It is crucial to note that a crisis often has direct impacts on organizational performance, followed by negative outcomes (Odunlami et al., 2020, pp. 324-325). What is added by Sellnow (2013, pp. 2-3) is that, as the nature of crises is unpredictable, anomalous, and unique, theorizing about them does not come without challenges although their increasing frequency in the contemporary societies allows scholars in the field to identify and study similarities, frequencies, and relationships across their occurrences.

The occurrence of crises may be partly reasoned by the late modern attitude towards businesses, i.e., a *culture of uncertainty*. This means that industries tend and are required to look at the most probable risk to an organization but not as the worst

possible risk. In these circumstances, industries are often caught in an *uncertainty trap*, where the predictability-driven design of contemporary risk- and crisis management often underestimates the occurrence of unexpected and unlikely but possible events (Pearson et al., 2007, p. 3). This culture of uncertainty and how organizations react to this culture by focusing on predictable variables, i.e. on the probable risks that they might face, may often be the reason behind the development of an organizational crisis. This is due to the nature of crises as they, as mentioned earlier, develop and appear unexpectedly, and therefore cannot be approached through predictability.

2.4 What is crisis communication?

Considering the nature of crises as posing a threat for an organization and its actions, development, and credibility, *crisis communication* is a process used to respond to these threats and harms by preparing for, reducing, and limiting them by creating shared meaning through various publics (Sellnow, 2013, p. 13). Traditional and classical perspectives of crisis communication, where the role of the sender was emphasized to send the message to passive audiences, tended to conceptualize crisis communication as a unidirectional process of warnings and alerts. However, this conceptualization of crisis communication through the emergency broadcast system does not, in my opinion, consider and cover all the types of crises in the contemporary society such as organizational crises.

At the same time as corporate communication as an academic field developed, a more dynamic and transactive view of the process developed. According to this perspective, the public is seen as both senders and receivers of a message sent to them (Sellnow, 2018, pp. 10-11). Sellnow (2018, p. 14) separates the functions of crisis communication into three distinct categories, involving *environmental scanning* and *spanning*, *crisis response*, *crisis resolution*, and *organizational learning*. Out of these categories, the focus of the present study is on the strategies and activities associated with the crisis response. In relation to the crisis response, most studies in the field focus on the reputation

repair strategies as its core function (Park, 2017, p. 190). In sum, this can include strategies such as reminding the stakeholders of the good works of an organization prior to the crisis situation and their corporate social responsibility (CSR), which may result in a greater image and expectations regarding the actions of a certain company (Park, 2017, p. 191).

Frandsen and Johansen (2017, p. 89) state that it is challenging to define crisis communication, and only a few scholars have attempted to determine what the concept is about. However, based on their understanding (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017, p. 89), various scholars have adopted the theory and definition by Sturges (1994), belonging to one of the few scholars who has attempted to define the term and process. Sturges, as referred to by Frandsen and Johansen (2017, p. 90), has divided the process of external crisis communication into three, separate stages and types. These types are classified as follows:

- (1) **Instructing information**, that is ‘[i]nformation that tells people affected by the crisis how they should physically react to the crisis’ (p. 308)
- (2) **Adjusting information**, that is ‘[i]nformation that helps people psychologically cope with the magnitude of the crisis situation’ (p. 308)
- (3) **Internalizing information**, that is ‘[i]nformation that people will use to formulate an image about the organization’ (p. 308).

Frandsen and Johansen (2017, p. 70) additionally explain that crisis management can be defined through a staged approach, developed by scholars such as Flink (1986) and Mitroff (1994). For instance, Mitroff (1994) has developed a model constructing of five stages of crisis management: *1. Signal detection, 2. Probing and prevention, 3. Damage containment, 4. Recovery, and 5. Learning*. These stages, as such, do not represent the development of a crisis event, but rather different types of crisis management interventions (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017, p. 70). However, as this model can be viewed as one way to categorize the development of the crisis management process, it must be noted that these models vary between researchers and disciplines and therefore the

model created by Mitroff (1994), or other aforementioned scholars, cannot be seen as the only truth or way to see the process.

3 PERSPECTIVES ON HUMOUR

Humor can be seen as a multi-faceted concept entailing a multitude of definitions (Chiaro, 2017, p. 8), making the concept both a complex, and an interesting phenomenon to study. Referring to the psychologist Rod Martin (2007), Chiaro (2017, pp. 8-9) sets an idea that humor can be viewed as a technique of mental play, compromising cognitive, emotional, social, and expressive components, but also the aspects of laughter and the sense of humor. Humour has been defined by several scholars and theorists, the definitions varying across their works. As Attardo (2014) describes in their work, humour has commonly been understood as an umbrella term, under which synonyms and overlapping definitions of its particles fall, including terms such as *comic*, *ridicule*, *laughable*, *ludicrous*, and *merry*; therefore, the entire world of humour cannot be understood solely through a single concept or aspect to be analyzed.

Overall, there is a broad controversy on humour and its understanding (Berger, 1993, p. 2). One of the main features that humour is often associated with is its ability to convey and lead to pleasure, but the means in which pleasure is created through its use are complicated to explain and understand. This, as well as the struggles to grasp a common understanding of humour as a phenomenon, are partly reasoned by the endless range of experiences that evoke humour, the domains in which it occurs (Warren & McGraw, 2016, p. 408), as well as the subjective nature of the phenomenon (Lockyer & Weaver, 2021, p. 652). Some studies such as the one by Berger (1993) have aimed to find out which aspects generate humour and provoke laughter, or other forms of pleasure after encountering something humorous. These kinds of studies are often, however, encountered by critique of forced 'objectivity' as it is described by Lockyer and Weaver (2021, p. 652). This happens since the subjective nature of humour may result in findings subject to and biased by the researcher's own thoughts, experiences, and background.

Thus, typologies of humor such as the one created by Berger (1993) should not be completely trusted or solely relied on as they can be criticized, for example, based on Berger's (1993) personal and professional background. This is considered as a limitation of the present study, too, as the findings presented later on are likely to be biased both by my own, subjective notion of the phenomena standing out from the data as well as by the subjective experience of humour by Berger (1993) in the process of creating the original typology. However, this has been limited as much as possible by strengthening the description of humour types with other studies than only the one by Berger (1993).

Considering the scope of means through which humour evokes, my notion is that the concept cannot be understood only through the reaction of laughter and is not bound to this concept. This aspect is crucial to consider as the common vision of humour may be to link it with a reaction to laugh that evokes from something funny. On the other hand, while laughter can act as a positive signal, it can additionally act as a signal or rejection (Ritter et al., 2015, p. 178) and the fear of being humiliated, belonging to the characteristics of social anxiety. People may laugh to show agreement, simply as others are laughing in a certain situation, or because an interaction is perceived as safe (Oveis et al., 2016, pp. 109-110). Hence, the view in my study is that laughter cannot be the only prerequisite for something to be conceptualized as humoristic, as laughter can evoke from a multiple of other reasons, too.

3.1 Theories of humour

The phenomenon of humour, although a multifaceted and interdisciplinary concept, is partly understood in previous studies through the relief, incongruity, and superiority theories, with their background in studies of psychology and in understanding how the humoristic impact evokes. The following sections have been devoted to the coverage and understanding of these two theories. As an introduction, all theories have been developed by the psychology theorists Sigmund Freud and Immanuel Kant

(Odunlami et al., 2020, p. 325). The main point of the *relief theory* is in the function of humour in the physiological release of tension, the *incongruity theory* in contradictions between expectations and experiences, and the *superiority theory* in the sense of supremacy over others.

3.1.1 The Relief Theory

The relief theory of humour is based on the idea that humour and laughter are evoked due to the sensation of the reduction of stress and tension while doing so (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 351). Additionally, the laughter that has been evoked may result in the feeling of mirth or relief that consequently lead to the cognitive reduction and release of anxiety or tension (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 351). According to Meyer (2000, p. 312), too, from the viewpoint of the relief theory, people sense and experience humour and laugh due to the sensation of stress being reduced in a certain way while doing so. To this view, the physiological manifestations or symptoms of humour are the most crucial, stemming from the tension that is being released when tensions are removed. Although the present study additionally considers the aspect of laughter in relation to humour, it is also aiming to take a broader stance on the theme where laughter, as well as the physiological benefits caused by it, are not in the center.

3.1.2 The Incongruity Theory

According to the incongruity theory, on the other hand, there is an argumentation that all kinds of humour include differences between one's expectations and what they receive (Berger, 1993, p. 3). The term 'incongruity' can consist of various meanings and interpretations, such as inconsistent, not conforming, and not harmonious, being the main point of the theory itself (Berger, 1993, p. 3). Referring to the conceptualization of the incongruity theories by Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009, p. 352), too, the audience or people in general terms laugh at something that either surprises them or violates the accepted and commonly understood pattern.

Incongruity theory relies heavily on cognition, where individuals must hold a common understanding of the typical patterns of reality prior to being able to notice deviations in these patterns (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352). Relying on the fact that there is little previous research on humour as applied in crisis communication and the nature of crises as unanticipated events in an organization, it can be said that humour in crisis communication might go hand in hand with the incongruity theory of humour. As crises are mostly seen as threatening and negative events for an organization and/or the publics, the application of humour in such a case can be seen as violating the accepted, commonly agreed pattern. Therefore, it is also crucial to cover this theory in the present study, not to mention the incongruity theory as a dominant theory accounting for most situations of perceived funniness (Warren & McGraw, 2016, p. 408).

3.1.3 The Superiority Theory

As opposed to the two theories presented above, the superiority theory, as the last concept to be covered here, proposes that laughter at faulty behaviors can reinforce unity between the members of a certain group of individuals (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352). According to Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009, p. 352), superiority humour can be seen as serving two central, societal functions: Maintaining laughter as social order, and maintaining the unity of a certain group. According to Keith-Spiegel (1972, pp. 5-6) as referred to by Lintott (2016, p. 348), the principle of superiority, mockery, ridicule and laughter at the foolish actions of other are central to the experience of humour and are seen as essential components of anything humorous. The superiority theory can, as stated by Lintott (2016, p. 348), also cover and consider the technique of self-deprecating humour, where the evoked laughter expresses experiences and a feeling of superiority over other individuals or over a former state of ourselves.

However, criticism towards the superiority theory exists, and the traditional theory cannot be seen as entirely unproblematic. As addressed by Lintott (2016, pp. 348-349), individuals can, in addition to foolish actions, laugh out of nervousness, at an incongruity, in surprise, or at an innocent joke. These can be viewed as relevant

counterarguments towards the superiority theory, and the cases only capturing the examples of humorous laughter may be a mistaken concession. Where laughter can be evoked by experiencing something humorous, the approach adopted in the present study is also that laughter cannot be the only prerequisite for something to be seen as humorous or to be understood as humour. This is since laughter can, in fact, also evoke out of nervousness, innocent factors, or something surprising, depending on the individual and the situation at hand.

3.2 Techniques of humour

The most extensive typology of humour that is applied in the present study is the one put together by Berger (1993). Despite the typology having been put together decades ago, it is one of the only, comprehensive typologies that have been created with the focus on separate techniques of humour that can be applied in the study and identification of the mechanisms of humour in a certain data set. This point is supported by Juckel et al. (2016, p. 585), who explain that the research using categorized types of humour is limited. However, what is additionally mentioned by them (Juckel et al., 2016, p. 585) is that the most extensive typology was originally created by Berger (1993). Therefore, due to the relevance of the typology in contemporary research and the lack of other, as comprehensive typologies in the field, the application of Berger's (1993) glossary is reasoned. Thus, the present study uses Berger's (1993) set of techniques as the basis of the analysis of the devices of humour within the chosen data set. However, what must already be noted and what has also been discussed earlier is that Berger's typology, despite its relevance for the research of humour today, can additionally be criticized and does not come without challenges.

To get an overview of the production and analysis of the different devices of humour, the categorization of these techniques as developed by Berger (1993) can be applied. The idea behind this categorization is that each humour technique falls under one of the four main categories, based on what kind of humour is being

produced in a certain situation. These categories are classified by Berger (1993, p. 17) and in their later work (2011, p. 3) as follows:

1. *Language*. The humour is verbal.
2. *Logic*. The humour is ideational.
3. *Identity*. The humour is existential.
4. *Action*: The humour is physical or nonverbal, involving *action* or *visual* phenomena.

In the thesis, the focus is on the humour techniques included in the first category of language. However, a complete catalogue of the 45 techniques of humour included in the glossary with brief definitions is offered in Appendix 1.

The decision to focus on the first category only is justified by the characteristics of the other three categories and their suitability for the analysis. First of all, according to Berger (2011, p. 3), the category of action is classified as humour constructed through visual phenomena. Humour belonging to the category of action involves techniques such as slapstick, constructed through characters with pies thrown in their faces, slips on banana peels, and the destruction of objectives (see Appendix 1, p. 82). It can be said that websites, such as the one in focus in the present study, may include sections where visual -or other multimodal elements, in addition to linguistic resources, are used for humour-making. Although I consider visuals as crucial elements in potentially enhancing the humorous message and how it can be conveyed, the present study focuses only on the way in which language is used on the website for the creation of humour. Therefore, I will be focusing on analyzing linguistic resources only, although visuals, in a way, could also be seen as part of language, depending on one's perspective on the topic.

Logic, as a category of humour, is used to play with a general sense of order, rationality, reasoning processes, as well as possibility and probability (Berger, 1993, p. 19). Therefore, techniques belonging to this category such as absurdity, disappointment and repetition, are used to generate humour in a sense that they play with and break

the general expectations and norms in the world. They link to the abovementioned incongruity theory of humour, where there is a deviation between one's expectations and what is received (Berger, 1993, p. 3). In logic, the use of language is not as central in how the humour is experienced and created, but it mostly links with deviations in general expectations as well as absurdity although language can act as conveying these deviations. Therefore, these techniques have been excluded from the analysis as the process is limited to those mechanisms that require language and linguistic elements for the humoristic effect.

Lastly, in relation to identity, it can be said that existential characteristics in humour creation are considered prior to linguistic elements. This point is illustrated by Berger (1993, p. 26) as they define one of the techniques falling under identity, i.e., caricature. The idea of caricature emerges from the grotesque representation of people by exaggerating their characteristics and features (see Appendix 1, p. 79). Therefore, it can be said that existential, physical characteristics in humour creation are considered prior to linguistic elements, and they do not relate to, or fulfill the purposes of the present study. In a way, this category and the techniques belonging to it could, from a critical perspective, be viewed to overlap with the techniques in the fourth category, action. For example, caricatures often employ drawings or other visual forms to convey the humoristic message, in which an individual's characteristics are drawn in an exaggerated manner (Berger, 2011, p. 10).

Although Berger's (1993) typology is one of the most well-known and comprehensive typologies on humour techniques (Juckel et al., 2016, p. 585), the typology should be criticized to some degree. This criticism can be targeted to, for example, the extent to which each device, their multitude, and their application have been covered in the typology. This disadvantage is addressed by Berger (1995, p. 55) themselves as well, by creating a distinction between extensive and narrow techniques. One of the narrow techniques that is included in this distinction are insults where satire and parody, on the other hand, are listed as examples of the more extensive devices. In addition, what comes to Berger's (1993) model and what could be,

to some extent, also criticized, is that the opposites of certain techniques, according to Juckel et al. (2016, p. 585), are treated as the original humour technique and not listed as a device of their own. For instance, exaggeration and its reversal, i.e., understatement, have been marked under the technique of exaggeration in the classification system. Thus, a single technique, as listed in the glossary might, in fact, cover multiple different devices and ways of constructing humour.

Lastly, in Berger's (1993) work, the glossary and the application of the techniques in practice have been illustrated through jokes, through which the definition and deeper explanations for each of the devices have been additionally provided (p. 15). From my perspective, jokes may require situational or cultural aspects to be conveyed and understood as well, and they should not be the only perspective from which the techniques are illustrated. As the purpose of Berger's (1993) original glossary was to analyze jokes, the suitability of the typology as it is, for the purposes of the present study in analyzing corporate -and crisis communication, had to be criticized. As a result, some of the techniques and their definitions have been broadened with the help of other, existing research, for a more thorough analysis of Oatly's webpage. Furthermore, an additional technique of *self-deprecation* was added to the existing typology for the purposes of the thesis.

Self-deprecation can be seen to relate to the opposites of the humour techniques, where these reversals are treated by Berger (1993) as the original technique that they represent and, in this case, self-deprecation can be seen to link partly with insults, as they are categorized in Berger's (1993) classification system. The description of this device, as well as the justification behind the division of self-deprecation as its own technique, will be presented in the following paragraphs.

3.2.1 Techniques of humour applied in the analysis

Allusion

The first technique to be defined is called allusion. According to Berger (1993, p. 21), allusions are a central aspect of daily humour or, in their words (1993, p. 21), "*the*

bread and butter of everyday humor". Allusions are, for the most part, linked to social and political matters and topics as well as situations with a sexual dimension to them, where all these dimensions and matters may also be combined. In some instances, such as scandals as in the data of the present study, too, only mentioning the name of a specific individual might be enough to evoke laughter or other interpretation of the message as humorous by its audience. Moreover, allusions often relate to errors, mistakes, and stupid things that people say or/and do that become known for a certain, distinct reason. One of the main characteristics of allusions is that they are tied to information that people have and are used as cues to make people recall these mistakes or other characteristics for humorous. These features cannot, however, be too serious in nature for them to generate humour (Berger, 1993, p. 21).

To broaden the understanding of the technique, allusions, as described Pilyarchuk (2023, p. 122), referring to the work by Irwin (2001, p. 287), are, in a more general sense, indirect references requiring more than the sole substitution of a referent. Allusions have the possibility of creating and maintaining a bond between the audience and an author as they, in cases where the hidden reference is understood, share a secret about a coded meaning that others may not be able to assess without the required background knowledge. These coded meanings can relate to aspects such as texts, events, people, and so on, that are applied within a specific, individual work (DaFoe, 2014, p. 4).

Definition

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), a definition can be understood as "*A statement that explains the meaning of a word or phrase, and / or a description of the features and limits of something.*" In my study, this notion of the concept will be applied, but a humoristic viewpoint to definitions will be considered in relation to the used data to fulfill my aim and research questions.

In sum, according to Berger (1993, p. 30), humoristic definitions differ from classical definitions in a sense that, when applied for humoristic purposes, definitions pose a

joke or another kind of an unexpected occurrence for its audience. What is more, in contrast to the Cambridge Dictionary's (n.d.) understanding on definitions, in humorous definitions there is, in the aforementioned manner, an aspect of trickery involved. The trickery is created from the experience of the reader as finding a light approach to a word or a phrase that is being defined where they, in most cases, expected a serious and heavy approach instead (Berger, 1993, p. 30). This premise for something serious and heavy is reasoned by Berger (2011, pp. 15-16) with the claim that, for the most part, people associate definitions with dictionaries, and do not know to expect a humorous stance on them.

Moreover, referring to Berger (1993, p. 30), defining something additionally provides their user some kind of power and enables the simultaneous use of other techniques as well, such as insult and exaggeration. Due to this claim, it can be addedly stated that the use of humorous definitions offers their user a variety of possibilities and different, humorous purposes and messages to be composed. This stance and perspective on humorous definitions and their combinations with other devices of humour will be considered in the analysis, too, although the focus will mostly be on the most dominant humour technique at play.

Facetiousness

Berger (1993, p. 35) describes facetiousness as nonserious use of language with a joking tone. Facetiousness can partly be understood as a weaker form of irony, where the humour exists between the distinction in what is said and what is actually meant (Berger, 1993, p. 40). In both facetiousness and irony, the audience needs to read and recode the message where, in irony, this is achieved by reversal and in facetiousness through discounting (Berger, 1993, p. 35).

Referring to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), it is added that facetiousness involves the processes of joking or jesting often inappropriately. In facetiousness, it is crucial to note that, when applying the technique, the message or its user may easily be misunderstood, and therefore the fact of being facetiousness, i.e., applying nonserious

language in a serious occurrence for solely humoristic purposes, must be made clear to the audience (Berger, 1993, p. 20).

Wordplay and puns

The technique of puns and wordplay are used by Berger (2011, p. 34) to refer to the clever use of language, the purpose of which is to amuse and entertain the audience. More specifically, wordplay, according to Berger (2011, p. 34) involves witty language and comments conveyed in a timely manner. The purpose of treating puns and wordplay under one technique instead of dividing them into two, separate devices is that puns can be treated as a specific form of wordplay, using a word's sound to mean two, separate things (Berger, 2011, p. 34).

Let me focus on the definition of wordplay, first. Thaler (2016, p. 51), in their work, defines wordplay and its classification based on the functions that it plays in certain discursive contexts, such as in jokes, literary texts, and newspaper headings. According to them (Thaler, 2016, p. 51), wordplay can, alike the definition by Berger (2011), be applied to amuse people and achieve humorous effect, but simultaneously to ridicule and embarrass out-group members to enhance in-group solidarity, to attract or maintain the audience's attention, and so on. Where puns, as aforementioned, are a form of wordplay applying the sounds of a specific word to mean separate things (Berger, 2011, p. 34), in wordplay there are nearly unlimited number of alternatives to modify linguistic material (Thaler, 2016, p. 52). However, their creative and timely application in a specific situation is what creates the humour itself (Berger, 2011, p. 34).

Wordplays, to mention a few examples can, first of all, be executed through phonetic techniques, i.e., forms of human sound-making, especially those used in speech (Crystal, 2008, p. 363). These include devices such as *homophones* (two phonetically identical elements with different meanings) or similarities in pronunciation (*homoeponic play*), giving rise to new meanings which can additionally be understood as puns, when their intention in a specific context is to generate a humoristic effect.

Secondly, wordplays can be achieved through lexical techniques, under which devices such as *homonymy* (the juxtaposition of differing meanings of homonymic word forms, e.g., the different meanings of the verb *to strike*), and *paronymy* (expressions that are not identical but similar in their form, such as *pregnant* and *ignorant*) fall. Lastly, wordplay can rely on morphological techniques, involving irregular or clever word formation processes such as acronyms, i.e., abbreviations in more familiar terms.

Puns, then, are linguistic occurrences that, as mentioned earlier, use the sounds of specific words to mean two different things (Berger, 2011, p. 34), constructed through homophones or homoephonic play (Thaler, 2016, pp. 52-53). What is illustrated by Mikics (2007, p. 87) is that a pun only works as it plays with the difference between two words and sounds, generating its significance and the humorous effect in a specific situation. What comes to the aforementioned distinction between homophones and homoephonic play, it can be stated that puns can be generated both with identical elements in sound-making and pronunciation of certain, sequential words, but also with similarities in their pronunciation. However, the distinction between wordplay and puns can be challenged for their vacillating differences. For example, paronymy and homoephonic play may be viewed to go hand in hand in how paronymy focuses on the lexical similarities of words, and homoephonic play with their similarities in pronunciation. In fact, in the lexical wordplay examples of the words *pregnant* and *ignorant*, the words are, in addition to their lexical similarities, also pronounced in a similar way.

Insults

It may be said that insults as a humour technique are quite self-explanatory in nature. In short, according to Berger (2011, p. 26), humorous insults can be identified as the direct use of verbal aggression in an attempt to demean a person, an institution, or other similar object for humoristic effect. For identifying insults from a set of data, Berger (2011, p. 26) states that the characteristics of a humorous insult often include

wild comparisons, attacks on sexual aspects, as well as references and allusions to embarrassing actions from one's past.

Previous research by Daly (2018) has similarly reported different varieties of insults, approaching the technique from a rhetorical viewpoint. What is added by Daly (2018, pp. 511-512) is that, in rhetoric, as written by Aristotle, insults consist of doing or saying things entailing shame for the target or victim, done for the fun of it only. On the other hand, it must be noted at this point that insults can be created accidentally as well, and people can be insulted for other reasons than humoristic purposes, too (Daly, 2018, p. 512). This point is highlighted by Berger (2011, p. 26) as they state that insults are not by themselves humorous, but that they must include a 'play frame', i.e., be tied to a role or a part of one's act, or alternatively combined with other techniques to yield a humorous effect. In general, insults are a dangerous way of generating humour, but are commonly applied. In every case, the insulter must make it clear that the insults are not real but are used in a playful manner for purposes of humour (Berger, 2011, p. 26).

Furthermore, in Berger's (1993) typology, insults can also be reversed, where they are directed at oneself to generate *victim humour* (Berger, 2011, p. 26). This relates to the aforementioned point (see p. 26) of the opposites of certain techniques in Berger's (1993) glossary which, referring to Juckel et al. (2016, p. 585), are treated as the original humour technique, and not listed as a device of their own. This is the case with insults, too, where I wished to divide the insults directed to others and those targeted to oneself as separate humoristic devices. This illustrated the narrowness of Berger's (1993) techniques in the typology where insults, according to them (Berger, 1995, p. 55), are seen as one of the narrow ones. What will be demonstrated in the following section of self-deprecating humour is that the techniques of insults and self-deprecation, i.e., insults targeted at oneself, can be quite different from each other, and therefore should not be treated as the same device. It needs to be noted that this might be the case with other techniques in the glossary, too, but in this study the techniques are broadened only if it is seen relevant for the analysis.

Self-deprecation

One of the main humorous techniques that the study is covering, in addition to the typology by Berger (1993), with the idea of extending the existing glossary, is *self-deprecating humour*. To illustrate this technique and its functions, the study by Andeweg et al. (2011) will mostly be applied. Their understanding of the identification of self-deprecating humour from a certain set of data will be applied in the analysis, too.

The previous study by Andeweg et al. (2011, p. 760) has reported that, with self-deprecating humour, people tend to use themselves as the joke of a comment or as the target of the humour utilized. At the same time, they are showing their ability to refer to their inabilities or problems in a humoristic, non-serious manner. It often draws on certain physical, social, or behavioral faults of an individual or a group one belongs to, and if the humour in a specific situation it is applied fails, these shortcomings may be taken literally instead. As self-deprecating humour is usually a form of improvisation instead of a premediated device, its use and interpretations by the publics does not come without risks (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 760). Where this device can lower barriers between the speaker and the audience (Lee et al., 2015, p. 1186), its effects may also be context-bound and lead to negative scores in skills and qualifications and the degree to which a presentation is perceived as intriguing (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 760).

Self-deprecation has been covered in an increasing amount of literature in relation to its interactional functions (Speer, 2019, p. 808). What we know about self-deprecating humour and its functions in interaction based on earlier research is that, in some circumstances, the device may be applied by people of high status to fake inferior personality traits to win the support of others (Greengross & Miller 2008; Stewart, 2011, pp. 204-205). This point is reinforced by Zeigler-Hill et al. (2013, p. 203), as they express that only those individuals with a higher status afford to handicap themselves by certain types of humour, such as self-deprecation. In interactions, self-deprecating humour should, with respect to previous research, be embedded with the

ingredients of transcendence, connection, and acceptance. Put differently, the joke should enable the speaker to escape a specific difficult, to bond with the listener, and to inspire the teller and their audience to embrace their vulnerabilities (Atkinson, 2015).

What is challenging in relation to this technique is that most works and books do not expand on the specific characteristics of self-deprecating humour (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 761). However, the division in Table 1, as originally put together by Andeweg et al. (2011, p. 761), covers some commonly applied sources for the understanding of this type of humour such as those by Chang and Gruner (1981), Hackman (1986), and JFK. This division will be applied in the analysis of the data of the thesis, too, and is illustrated in the table below.

<p><i>Poking fun at your own personal characteristics / faults</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “ten quadrillion [makes a slip of the tongue] and really, I did practice at home pronouncing it correctly” (# 6) - “of course in my current sober state I surely would understand the apple in the comparison; (#7) - “you as young engineers can make a much better numerical estimation than a communication teacher like me” (#13)
<p><i>Poking fun at your own professional life</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “my job as communication teacher is like that; I lose sleep over correcting your reports and presentations. Look at the bags under my eyes” [bags are not apparent/visible] (#1) - “even after my explanations you will not be able to solve your financial problems as I have experienced with mine” (#2) - “it is clear that it [a space] does not resemble my office at the university. You could not store a single cow in there.” (#3)
<p><i>Poking fun at your profession (sociological in-group)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “they [colleagues] wrote a text book on the subject and they are as fond as I am of using football fields and Boeings in comparisons involving large numbers” (#9) - “one could use the results to make a more reliable coffee machine at our faculty; the present one is often overloaded by our heavy use” (#12)

Table 1: Division and Examples of Self-deprecating humour (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 761).

Shortly, the analysis of self-deprecating humour focuses on the aspects of poking fun at one's own personal characteristics and/or faults, poking fun at one's professional life, and poking fun at one's profession, i.e., socio-logical in-group.

In my opinion, the typology by Berger (1993) does not consider the different forms of humour extensively enough and, in relation to insults, the characteristics of the technique are approached solely through insults targeted to others, i.e., comparisons, attacks on sexuality, and allusions to from one's past. However, in humour targeted to oneself, these characteristics might not be enough to comprehensively analyze how people make fun of themselves for humoristic effect. Moreover, the 'play frame' in self-deprecation could be seen to be created by one insulting themselves and might not require other techniques to be applied simultaneously, as in insults to others. Therefore, I found it important to expand the typology for this study with self-deprecating humour.

4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

4.1 Previous research on humour in crisis communication

Humour, as its own phenomenon, has been widely covered in previous studies. As stated by Attardo (2014), the concept of humour is interdisciplinary, and the field is covered and approached differently in relation to the discipline one is interested in or conducting research within. As some instances, cognitive psychology focuses on cognitive mechanisms triggering humour, sociology as a field covers the social aspects of humour, and linguistics is, for the most part, interested in the semantic and pragmatic aspects of language use that participate in the production of humour. Although the field is interdisciplinary and ideas are borrowed from other disciplines and fields of research (Attardo, 2014), for the sake of the present study, it was seen as relevant to solely rely on studies on humour in linguistics.

In general, humour in linguistic studies is often approached through a classification system, where the forms of humour are categorized based on their means. In addition to the classification system by Berger (1993, p. 17), where all humoristic devices fall under the four categories of language, logic, identity, and action, other scholars have used different terms in their studies in forming these categories. The most common ones of these consist of verbal, physical, and visual humour, the classification system of which is applied by scholars such as Sover (2018) and Taylor (2014, p. 351).

Previous studies have similarly applied Berger's (1993) typology of humoristic devices to examine the occurrence of humour in certain data sets. In line with the present study, they applied the classification system to furtherly develop their own typology of humour by expanding those techniques provided by Berger (1993). Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) applied the typology with the aim of developing a glossary of humour in audiovisual media. Their inductive analysis resulted in seven humour categories (slapstick, clownish humour, surprise, misunderstanding, irony, satire, and parody), as opposed to Berger's (1993) four categories. Out of these, slapstick, surprise,

irony were the most commonly used techniques, in this specific order (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2004). Juckel et al. (2016) additionally adapted Berger's (1993) typology to develop a humour typology in order to identify styles of humour in sitcoms. The adaptation was reasoned, alike in this thesis, as Berger's typology relied on analyzing jokes, where a new typology was created to match the techniques with television program coding (Juckel et al., 2016, p. 586). As a result, they added five original, sitcom-specific techniques of wit, caught out, condescension, deceitful behavior, and self-deprecation (Juckel et al., 2016). The last technique of self-deprecation is in line with the present study, and additionally justifies the need of the technique of insults to be broadened from the original typology. The study found that the humour techniques applied varied significantly across the different sitcom programs, and that the techniques used aligned mostly with the superiority and incongruity theories of humour (Juckel et al., 2016, p. 595).

What comes to the use of humour in crisis communication, most of the studies found focused on the effects of humour as a crisis communication strategy, on organizational reputation, and stakeholder perception rather than on the techniques of humour identified from this organizational practice. For example, Hämpke et al. (2022, p. 678) examined how the public responds to humour in the crisis communication practices of a local government, depending on the government's responsibility on the crisis. The study (Hämpke et al., 2022, p. 678) expected that the impact of crisis responsibility on trust is controlled by the experiences of positive or negative affect, and that humorously framed crisis responses lead to increasing trust in the government. However, the study found that there was a lack between crisis responsibility and positive affect in trust and the public perception, and that humorous crisis communication does not have a beneficial impact on trust or other positive emotions (Hämpke et al., 2022, p. 686).

Similar findings were concluded by Xiao et al. (2017, p. 250), whose hypotheses assumed that humorously framed crisis communication strategies would increase the

perceived severity of the crisis, resulting in a higher level of perceived responsibility. The study (Xiao et al., 2017, p. 251) found that, during a crisis event, the use of humour decreased the perceived sincerity of the organization, leading to higher attribution on crisis responsibility. In addition, in line with the results by Hämpke et al. (2022), the research found that the use of a humorous response strategy resulted in a lower reputation assessment in comparison to a rational communication strategy (Xiao et al., 2017, p. 254).

4.2 Previous research on Oatly

As the data of the study consist of the crisis communication campaign by Oatly, it is crucial to cover the amount of research that has been conducted on the company, despite the field or the theme related to which the study of the company has been conducted. Doing this, it will be easier to understand the predominant communication style of the organization and in which ways this might link to, for instance, the humour applied in the chosen campaign used as the data for the present study.

In relation to Oatly and the organization's communication with its stakeholders and the dairy industry, themes such as dairy lobbying, distinct advertising style, as well as creative trademarks were prominent in the previous research subjects that were found in the field. Studies such as the ones by Swain (2023) and Krampe and Fridman (2021) provide overviews on the growth of the company as a brand. In their analysis, Swain (2023) critically investigated Oatly's controversies with the dairy lobby of Sweden from the perspective of the organization's use of trademarks and advertising campaigns in defending itself from the lobby. The results of the study show that Oatly's creative trademarks such as the 'It's like milk but made for humans' and other forms of brand activism have enabled it to enhance customer loyalty (Swain, 2023, p. 71). The application on Oatly's unusual campaigns have, from time to time, caused disruption or debate, such as the lawsuit received from the Swedish dairy lobby but have, in the end, concluded with effective results in terms of publicity (Swain, 2023, pp. 71-

72). This being said, the crises faced by the company are a prevailing topic addressed in previous studies, too, justifying the need for a more elaborative analysis on their crisis communication, and the need for the present study.

In previous studies, it has been marked that the distinct and original communication style of the company is present in the crises faced by them, too. Krampe and Fridman (2021), similarly to the study by Swain (2023), addressed the 'It's like milk but made for humans' campaign, but additionally explained the way in which Oatly responded to the lawsuit. In short, the campaign and the distinct communication style in responding to the lawsuit were combined with personal, provocative, witty, and unopinionated elements, marking the turning point in Oatly's mission, too. Although the company and its operations have distributed all around the world, they are still seen to put remarkable efforts in remaining true to their communicational vision (Krampe & Fridman, 2021). This being said, and with the justification on Oatly's personal style of communication, it is interesting to approach the topic from the perspective of humour studies and see how different humour techniques contribute to the construction of the company's communication style, particularly when responding to crises.

Overall, Oatly is a company that has caught the interest of several scholars, and is a subject researched comprehensively in many fields. Still, although the crises faced by the company have been mentioned in previous research, they have not been discussed in more detail to find out what kinds of responses the company has created in relation to these events. In addition to the aforementioned studies, Oatly has been studied from the point of view of brand-initiated political activism (Koch, 2020; Ledin & Machin, 2020), their marketing and business strategies in general (Bocken et al., 2020; Fuentes & Fuentes, 2016), and in various, previous Master's theses across universities.

5 THE PRESENT STUDY

5.1 Aims and research questions

The aim of the present study is to investigate the fields of crisis communication and humour together, with the purpose of identifying the individual techniques of humour that manifest on the crisis communication website *F*ck Oatly*, launched by the Swedish oat-drink manufacturer, Oatly. Moreover, my aim is to find out how humour is constructed through the application of these techniques. This is achieved by an original typology of humour developed solely for the purposes of this study, with Berger's (1993) *Typology of Humour*, and other studies in the field of humour as its main source.

Therefore, the research questions for the study are the following:

1. Which techniques of humour manifest in the crisis communication website by Oatly?
2. How is the humorous effect constructed through these techniques?

5.2 Research data and data collection

The research data for the thesis consists of an individual campaign website by Oatly (*F*ck Oatly*), focusing on the crisis communication and crisis responses of the organization. The rationale behind the selection of campaigns as the main data is their crucial role in public relations. Furthermore, they provide an appropriate amount of data to be studied considering the scope of a Master's thesis. Although the data of the present study consists of an individual website only, the website includes several subsections devoted to the crisis events which will be examined in the analysis in addition to the front page. The website has been chosen based on its function as one of the main sites of communication in relation to the organizational crises faced by Oatly, in addition to the statements and reports published by them.

The data collection process began on February 6th, 2024, prior to which I familiarized myself with the website and the crisis events in question. These events will be briefly introduced in the section where the purpose and details of the F*ck Oatly campaign are presented (5.2.1. *About Oatly and the chosen campaign*). First, the data collection started with a more elaborate look on the website, exploring the themes catching my attention from the data in terms of humoristic or extraordinary elements in crisis communication. This first exploration of the campaign website included taking notes on the data and the first thoughts that it evoked, as well as printing the pages on the website on paper to ease the data collection process and the reduction of irrelevant material.

What needs to be noted at this point is that all of these initial observations and first stages of data collection were conducted without a certain background theory to guide the collection process. Berger's (1993) typology and the other relevant sources were brought to the data collection and analysis later as the analysis itself proceeded. Therefore, after comprehensive, initial observations and extracts of the data were captured and written down, they were categorized in relation to the relevant background theories. First, a preliminary categorization of the elements was conducted using tabulation to see into which categories the techniques could potentially fall. After this, I conducted a more careful analysis and tabulation, based on which the final coding frame and categories for analysis were developed. Where the first stages of data collection lasted from the 6th of February until approximately the end of February, the latter steps presented in this section were finalized until the end of March.

The material of the F*ck Oatly website consists of both written text and images, due to which the data and findings will be presented both in the form of written extracts and screenshots to best illustrate the visual aspects. For using screenshots, a permission from Oatly to capture and apply visual extracts from the website in the thesis was ensured via email on October 17th, 2023 for ethical purposes. The permission from

Oatly to utilize the campaign website and screenshots from it in the present study was granted on October 18th, 2023. The email in which the permission was granted can be viewed in Appendix 2 (p. 84). What needed to be considered in the data collection and analysis process is the fact that the website might change or completely disappear over time, which is the reason behind the utilization of screenshots, as well.

5.3 About Oatly and the chosen campaign

To get an overview of the company behind the development of the website used, the following sections are dedicated to the introduction of Oatly. Oatly is a Swedish company with their focus on the production of oat-based products, found by Lund University researchers in the early 1990s (Oatly Sustainability Report, 2022, p. 3). As mentioned, the company is mainly known for their oat-based products with their different variations such as oat drinks (the Barista edition, the Chocolate Oat milk, the Original Oat milk, etc.), frozen desserts, cream cheese, and oat spreads (Stuff We Sell, n.d.). Oatly is currently the world's largest oat drink manufacturer. The rise of the brand and their products has mostly been related to their alternative means towards the development and creation of customer loyalty as well as brand recognition. Examples of these include Oatly's utilization of trademarks, branding, as well as rather controversial advertising campaigns (Swain, 2023, p. 60).

Oatly is a company known for their strong opinions and style of communication (About Oatly, n.d.). This strong style of communication is evident both on the official website of the company (<https://www.oatly.com/fi-fi>), in their social media content, and in the data of the present study. This content often relates to themes such as the shift from the consumption of meat to the consumption of plant-based products and matters of equality. In the present study, I am interested in finding out how this communication style manifests in the crisis events faced by the company, many of them having to do with boycotts, ethical aspects, and the environment. According to Oatly's Sustainability Report (2022, p. 3), the company is striving to progress the global food

system towards more sustainable, plant-based production and consumption processes. Moreover, their partnership with stakeholders such as farmers, material suppliers, logistic partners, and co-manufacturers is highlighted in relation to their value chain throughout the Sustainability Report (2022).

To answer the research questions set up for the study, the thesis will focus on a specific website by Oatly, called F*ck Oatly (<https://fckoatly.com>). On this website, Oatly addresses a total of eight (8) scandals and crises that the company has experienced throughout the years. According to Sano and Sano (2019, p. 1), organizations have heavily relied on channels such as the mass media, websites, advertisements, and similar tools to communicate before, during, and after crises. With the development of Web 2.0, however, social media has provided a new tool of communication, although research in the field in recent years has been scarce. Today, official websites are still considered as highly credible sources of crisis information, in addition to the role of ongoing conversations in social media (Sano & Sano, 2019, p. 1). What is mentioned on the front page of the F*ck Oatly campaign website, the reason behind creating such a website lies both in the convenience of having all boycotts and criticism in the same place and purposes of transparency. The staff at Oatly, in their own words, see *“all the negative headlines, posts and petitions as an inevitable consequence of trying to create positive societal change”* (F*ck Oatly, n.d.).

The website consists of 9 pages altogether, a front page devoted to the introduction of the campaign and hyperlinks leading to pages involving specific information and communication on each crisis. The present study is covering all of the 9 pages in terms of the humoristic extracts found from them. The crises and their hyperlinks have their own titles, as well: *Go Feck Ourselves*, *Banned in Ireland*, *Glebe-Gate*, *Residue Ruckus*, *Blackstoned*, *The Daddy Issues*, *Oldies but Goldies*, and *Tik-Toxic*. These crises and what they are about will be covered in more detail in the analysis, but they mostly relate to boycotts, criticism, environmental and ethical issues, and bans. At the end of each subsection for the crises, screenshots of public comments on Oatly’s social media posts, some

of them with the company's responses to them, have been provided. However, for ethical purposes, the thesis will not be focusing on the data from social media, despite its importance in terms of crisis communication. Furthermore, it was noticed during the data collection process that not many of these comments would offer relevant findings for the purposes of the study in the first place.

5.4 Method of analysis

In this study, the data will be analyzed using qualitative content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2019, p. 24), in the heart of content analysis is the approach to a certain set of data from the perspective of how a specific object of analysis is conceived. A central conceptualization and idea in content analysis is that several items stemming from a specific, chosen text or content are classified into fewer content categories where the specific object of analysis can be conceived (Weber, 1990, p. 12). The purpose of this study is, through a detailed examination of the F*ck Oatly website, to gain specific insights on what kinds of humour are applied on the website for the construction of the crisis response, and how. Therefore, content analysis was seen as a suitable method for the present study in unfolding how different forms of humour manifest in the chosen data and to conceive the specific focus of analysis better.

Moreover, the thesis follows the guidelines of inductive content analysis, meaning that the analysis process proceeds from specific insights to generalizations where deductive analysis is the other way around (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 36). In my study, the analysis process began by taking a look at the data and seeing what kind of aspects in it were seen as humorous. Based on these findings, a suitable typology, i.e., Berger's (1993) glossary of the techniques of humour was searched for, applied, and modified to better suit the inductive findings and the analysis.

What needs to be noted at this point of the study is that, due to the nature of humour as a subjective phenomenon, the analysis and results of the study might not turn out

to be completely objective or replicable in future research. What I mean by this is that something that is interpreted as humorous by one may not be at all funny or evoke laughter in someone else. Thus, the analysis may be impacted by my own, subjective interpretations of the data set and what is conceived to be humorous or act as a specific form of humour. This highlights the meaning-making process of the method, too, where the process can be viewed as a complex phenomenon in which an individual assembles their perceptions of the chosen material. This process is furtherly impacted by one's own, personal knowledge and background, as well as their individual personalities, moods, and needs, differentiating content analysis from other analysis methods (Schreier, 2012, p. 2).

Content analysis can be conducted by both quantitative, and qualitative methods. More specifically, qualitative content analysis focuses on the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic manner, where sections of the chosen data set are assigned to the categories of the chosen coding frame and in which the features in the heart of the description and interpretation of the material are covered and unfolded (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). Where the original definition of content analysis by Berelson (1952) highlighted its quantitative nature, qualitative methods, according to Krippendorff (2013, p. 25), have additionally proven successful.

The present study benefits from the principles of qualitative content analysis in the way in which the analysis is conducted, and the findings presented by assigning relevant sections from the website into categories, according to the predetermined coding frame. In this study, the material is coded based on the humorous elements and forms of humour identified, where extracts belonging to a certain kind of humour are placed under a single category and their features described and interpreted in more detail. The qualitative method allows me to look deeper into how humour in this specific website manifests, and what kind of a role it plays in the crisis response. Oftentimes, the core aim of quantitative content analysis is to measure the numerical values, i.e., counts or amounts of a phenomenon (Neuendorf, 2016, pp. 9-10), where the purpose may be to achieve an overview and compare the occurrences of certain themes in a set

of data. However, my purpose is to offer perhaps a more elaborate analysis and presentation of the data and results, where the features and context of the devices will additionally be considered.

5.5 Ethical considerations

The ethical aspects regarding the study have been considered and written down based on the instructions for data protection from the University of Jyväskylä (<https://www.jyu.fi/en/data-privacy-at-the-university-of-jyvaskyla/instructions-for-students>). As the data for my thesis, I use the campaign website of Oatly, the staff of which I contacted before conducting the study itself, for their written permission to use the website and screenshots captured from it in the analysis (see Appendix 2, p. 84). The background and purpose of the research itself was described to the company and the maintenance of an objective and neutral tone without any personal opinions on the crises was assured. On the website, extracts from social media discussions around the scandals were presented. However, these comments and this material will not be used in the present study and therefore do not require additional, ethical procedures to be made.

6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I shall analyze the most relevant and prominent humour techniques identified from the chosen crisis communication website, F*ck Oatly. For sakes of clarity, the structure of the analysis and the results retrieved from the website are presented based on the humour technique that they represent. The structure and the results are presented by the most dominant technique of humour that each instance represents although, as stated by Berger (1993, p. 15), since humour and its works are incredibly complex, a number of different techniques are often found to operate simultaneously. Despite this, it is, in general terms, possible to identify which technique is dominant and which ones are secondary in jokes and in other texts (Berger, 2011, p. 4). The analysis, in this case, is constructed by the most dominant technique within a given set of data although other devices may be considered as well.

What needs to be noted is that some of the humour instances identified from the data have been left out from the analysis and the typology. This is the case since the aim of the present study is to get an overview of the most prominent devices applied in the construction of the crisis response in the F*ck Oatly campaign and, considering the scope of the study, it was not possible to analyze every instance that was identified. However, there naturally is some subjectivity involved in the process and in choosing the most relevant extracts and it must be kept in mind that other researchers may have gotten different results based on their own, subjective experience on the website.

6.1 Analysis of the humoristic devices in crisis communication

6.1.1 Allusion

There were several examples in the data and in relation to the crises responded to by Oatly benefiting from allusions as means of humour. On the other hand, the allusions have been constructed differently based on the circumstances in which they occur. Allusions and the coded meanings manifest in different ways, e.g., in relation to texts,

events, and people, and so forth (DaFoe, 2014, p. 4). Based on this understanding, versatile ways in constructing allusions were identified from the data. One of these examples is visible in Figure 3, below.

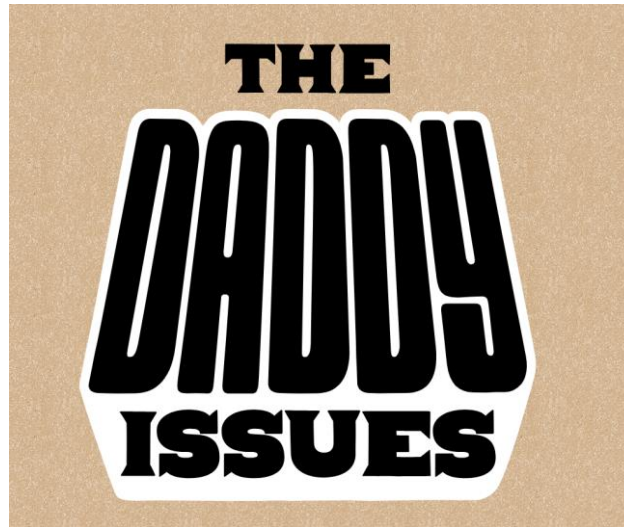


Figure 3. Title and hyperlink to one of the crisis events. (Retrieved from <https://fckoatly.com/the-daddy-issues> 5 April 2024).

The title above opens a new subsection on the website, including information and responses to one of the earlier crises faced by Oatly. As a brief introduction to the case, it links to an advertisement campaign published by the company in the United Kingdom, "Help Dad". The commercials played on common father-teenager interactions, with the teens convincing their dads to use more plant-based products. The crisis in this specific case evoked from the complaints about the campaign, where Oatly was accused of issues such as ageism, insensitiveness to alcoholism, and about their tone of voice on the environmental impacts of cow's milk. My aim is not to discuss the crisis events in a detailed manner, but contextual information may be needed to fully understand how the humoristic effect constructs in each case.

The title can be identified to illustrate Buijzen and Valkenburg's (2009) understanding of sexual allusions. In their study, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2009, p. 162) stated that sexual allusions are created through a reference to sexual or naughty matters to generate humour. Interestingly, this distinction is in line with, and explicates the findings

in my study. The relationship is reasoned by the lack of direct, lexical choices or wording related to sexual matters in the figure above, where a hidden reference to them exists. To illustrate this, we can see an implicit, sexual allusion behind the phrase “The Daddy Issues”, which can mean *distrust of, or sexual desire for men acting as father figures, resulting from psychological challenges from an abnormal relationship with one’s father* (Dictionary.com (n.d.)). The visual choices in the title enhance the allusion, where the words ‘Daddy’ and ‘Issues’ pop up with their bold frames and font size. Unfolding the hidden meaning behind the reference is what creates the humoristic effect in the case (Pilyarchuk, 2023, p. 122), although not all audiences may be capable of this interpretation depending on their knowledge of the matter. This, then, might lead to missed humour.

Excerpt 1 below takes a relatively different approach to allusions, now with a reference to texts, a piece of literature more specifically, which is why this excerpt was chosen as the second example to illustrate them. For contextual information, the scandal at hand refers to a lawsuit about copyright violation, and the excerpt has been captured from the subpage dealing with the scandal (<https://fckoatly.com/glebe-gate>). A company called *Glebe Farm* was taken to court by Oatly in relation to their oat drink product named PureOaty, which claimed to be too similar to the Oatly brand. The case led to petitions for boycotts of Oatly, as well as articles against the company. Oatly ended up losing the court case at the end.

Extract 1

- (1) This was a lawsuit about copyright infringement, and how the single letter Y creates too much of a similarity between OATY and OATLY. Unfortunately, many people saw it as a “David versus Goliath” showdown, or the age old “Small Swedish oat company makes it big, lets success go to their heads, forgets where they came from, and just starts suing anyone they can find.

The part “[...] a “*David versus Goliath*” showdown [...]” from the extract above is an example of Berger’s (1993) allusion category. There is a reference to behavioral characteristics illustrated as occurrences in literature, leading to interpretations that generate humour by the embarrassment of others that is defined by Berger (1993, p. 21) themselves as some of the common features of allusions. This will be described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

This example is a reference to the events in the Bible, where the names David and Goliath refer to some of the most known characters from the literary work. The World History Encyclopedia (n.d.) offers us some context in understanding what this particular reference is about. It relates to events in the Bible where David (the later king of Israel) slew Goliath (a giant), the champion of the enemy of Israel. Today, “David and Goliath” is often seen as a metaphor for a weaker individual who ends up as victorious over a more powerful opponent (World History Encyclopedia, n.d.). The allusion may not be understood by those audiences that are not familiar with the characters from the Bible, creating an implicit reference only unfolded by some visitors.

This kind of an allusion could be identified as an analogy or a metaphor, too, in addition to an allusion, i.e., an implicit reference to a certain text. Analogies and metaphors, as seen in Appendix 1 (see p. 77), are based on invidious comparisons and the combination of otherwise incongruous elements (Berger 1993, p. 22). Here, the crisis response makes a comparison between and unites the attendees of the events resulting in the scandal, i.e., the two companies and brands (*OATY* and *OATLY*) and the behaviors of David and Goliath, creating a metaphor. However, to understand the metaphor, one must first understand the reference to the characters and consequently to the events in the Bible, where the metaphor does not emerge in the minds of the audience without unfolding the allusion first. Thus, I interpret allusion as the dominant humour technique in this extract.

In general, allusions are one of the most common humoristic devices on the website. This analysis demonstrates that the humoristic effect on the website is partly created through the allusions that require some background knowledge for the hidden meaning to be unfolded by the audience (Berger, 1993, p. 21). In the first example, the reference carries at least two different meanings, both a sexual and an innocent one. Here, it is the sexual allusion that leads to a humorous reaction in some audiences who unfold its meaning, since sexual allusions can be humorous by themselves without the combination of other humour techniques and do not often cluster together with other mechanisms (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 162). This means that including a hidden, sexual meaning in an attempt to be humorous may, in some cases, be enough to evoke laughter in the audience. This may be the reason why the creators of the website have decided to apply this technique already in the title and in their crisis communication to highlight their humoristic tone and approach to the crises, which is a prominent theme throughout the sites.

In general, the application of allusions on the website can be linked to the incongruity theory (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352), where there is a deviation between what is expected and what is received, which evokes the humoristic response. For example, a sexual reference in a serious situation as embedded in an organization's crisis response violates the common norms and pattern and may result in a reaction of laughter. Moreover, the implicit reference to the two companies or brands as characters of the Bible, i.e., OATY as David (the underdog and the target of the lawsuit) and OATLY as Goliath (the giant, i.e., the bigger company behind the lawsuit) in the second example may not be something that the audience expects. The behaviors attached to these characters, as described above, constitute a metaphor of the events and the lawsuit leading to the scandal itself, where it may have been used as a way of Oatly embarrassing themselves for losing the court case and evoke laughter in others.

6.1.2 Definition

At the level of definitions, it was found that Oatly somewhat amuses their audience with unexpected definitions with a humoristic tone to them. Humoristic definitions mostly seemed to occur in those situations in which the company offered a brief description of what is meant by the concepts or terms applied by them and were found to overlap with other devices of humour, too. This finding supports Berger's (1993, p. 30) understanding of the device, as it is stated by them that definitions, in this case as techniques to convey humour and yield a humoristic reaction, allow their user to easily apply other devices within the same sequence.

From the extract here, the utilization of a humoristic definition can be captured. The extract and the situation relate to a crisis faced by the company as they used to sell their oat residue, i.e., the byproduct of the production of oat-based products to local pig farms as animal feed. This decision led the company to another boycott, where selling oat residue to feed pigs was not seen as a suitable way for the oat-drink company to deal with the byproduct, for the reason that people would be eating those pigs later on (The Residue Ruckus, n.d. <https://fckoatly.com/the-residue-ruckus>). This event has been addressed on the F*ck Oatly website in the following way.

Extract 2

- (2) When you make a lot of oat-based products, you're left with a bunch of oat waste. More specifically, you're left with tons of oat residue, like 100,000 plus tons of oat residue; that's the protein-rich, fibrous, grey sludge that all of us at Oatly have come to love.

In Extract 2, Oatly first discusses how oat residue develops in the production line of oat-based products. Then, the humoristic definition is seen as the sequence follows with a definition of the concept at the end. Here, oat residue is defined through the imagery of it as a grey sludge that is also protein-rich and fibrous and as something that the staff at Oatly have come to love. This extract fits into Berger's (2011, pp. 15-16)

description of humoristic definitions as defeated expectations, where the audience receives something light-hearted and frivolous, as they waited for a serious, dictionary-based definition instead. This, as a result, leads to a sense of incongruity (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352) in the audience. This is reasoned as the pattern and approach to definitions through a facetious, joking tone violates the commonly accepted pattern of definitions as serious descriptions through which an understanding of a certain term can be achieved. In this case, the humorous effect is consequently constructed through the anomalies and incongruity at play in the sequence, where people commonly find surprising or unexpected elements humoristic, and laugh at them (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352). Here, the definition of oat residue has been approached with a more playful tone and language through its attributes (protein-rich, fibrous, grey sludge), where this kind of language use may be enough to make the audience see the extract as funny.

This extract was chosen for the analysis as the humoristic effect in this case is enhanced by two, secondary devices from Berger's (1993) typology, analogy and irony (see Appendix 1, pp. 75-77). This is in line with Berger's (2011, p. 14) findings as, according to them, comic definitions often benefit from the simultaneous application of other techniques such as insults, sarcasm, and ridicule although the secondary devices in my analysis differ from those proposed by Berger (1993).

Briefly, by using analogies, a humoristic reaction is created by the combination of two, incongruous elements and their comparison (Berger, 1993, pp. 22-23). In Extract 2 above, oat waste is united with protein-rich and fibrous attributes, where these qualities are likely to be associated with something edible instead of something that might end up in the waste or which must be exploited in other ways than food, which creates the analogy. Irony, on the contrary, plays with knowledge, words and general logic, appeals to adolescents and the adult audience (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 163), and is achieved by saying one thing but meaning the opposite (Juckel et al., 2016, p. 588).

In the chosen extract, oat residue is referred to as something that the staff at Oatly have come to love which has, in fact, led them to the boycott in the first place. Therefore, the verb “love” is used ironically, to perhaps really mean that they do not love the situation and making decisions with the oat residue. Here, the audience may experience a feeling of superiority towards the company and their faulty decisions which is in the heart of the superiority theory of humour as an emotive theory of comic amusement (Lintott, 2016, p. 347). In superiority theory, the foolish decisions and actions of others are the main source of laughter, where this may be experienced by those understanding the real meaning behind the irony. In sum, it can be concluded that, in the case of definitions, the humour is being created through the unexpectedness of the language use in the context of crisis, where the playful tone, as well as the irony or contradiction between what is said and what is most likely the reality, exists. It may be that, with irony, Oatly has aimed to target especially the adult audience who probably belong to the main visitor group of the website.

6.1.3 Facetiousness

With respect to the device of facetiousness in relation to the present study and the process of crisis communication, one could take at least two different stances on how facetiousness, as a mechanism of constructing humour, manifests on the website. To recall what is meant by the concept, facetiousness can be defined as a character applying a nonserious language and tone of voice (Berger, 1993, p. 35) in serious circumstances (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

At this stage, we know that crisis times are characterized both by deviations in the social dynamics of societies with reactions of anxiety and trauma and as abrupt events in the existence of an organization with a widespread threat on aspects such as organizational reputation (Odunlami et al., 2020, p. 323; Sellnow, 2013, pp. 5-6). Based on these points and as humour, as a strategy of communication, is often not taken seriously based on the findings of Odunlami et al. (2020, p. 323), it could be argued that all the humour on the website counted as examples of facetiousness, i.e.,

nonserious use of language (humour) in a serious situation (crisis). This being said, I would like to challenge the existence of facetiousness in Berger's (1993) typology as an individual, countable humour technique, examples of which can be pointed out from a set of data. Based on my analysis, facetiousness can also count as a more general way of using language and being humorous, depending on the circumstances and the focus. Particularly, if the matter is serious, be it crisis or a completely different situation and it is responded to with humour, this perspective on facetiousness may apply.

On the other hand, referring to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), in facetiousness, the attempt to appear funny or clever stems from knowingly acting unserious about a serious subject. What was already found is that facetiousness can, depending on the situation and the focus, count as a more general way of using language and getting the humoristic approach and effect through. However, if facetiousness is approached rather through subjects that are addressed with a joking tone than generally through the circumstances, i.e., a serious situation, it is possible to draw individual examples from Oatly's website of such use of the mechanism.

To illustrate this, the following extract has been gathered from one of the subpages on the F*ck Oatly website, where the aforementioned advertisement campaign "*Help Dad*" has been discussed:

Extract 3

- (3) It took us 40 seconds (or less) to get accused of ageism, insensitivity to alcoholism and being anti-farmer. Record time!

Extract 3 demonstrates the use of facetiousness, where a serious subject is dealt with a non-serious, joking tone. The serious subjects in this example stem from the themes of ageism, alcoholism, and 'being anti-farmer' which, in this case, likely refers to the tone of voice on environmental impacts of milk in the commercials published for the campaign. Generally, these can be considered as serious and sensitive topics that

should be handled carefully. In the same example, it is mentioned that it took Oatly 40, or less, seconds to get accused of such actions, potentially referring to the length of the commercials or one of them. This is then followed by the concluding statement “*Record time!*” that, following the definition from Collins Dictionary (n.d.), stands for the fastest time recorded so far, or something being achieved very quickly overall. The exclamation mark at the end enhances the ending and the statement. Here, facetiousness is present in the frivolous use of language in the same sentence in which such sensitive topics are discussed. The ending statement of the new record time could be interpreted as Oatly seeing the number of accusations they have received within a time frame of only 40 seconds as the new high score. This fits the definition of facetiousness as joking language applied in relation to serious subjects, where the sensitive topics (alcoholism, ageism, the environment) act as the serious subjects in this situation.

In Extract 4, too, the use of frivolous, nonserious language in relation to a serious subject is illustrated. In this example, a court case faced by Oatly has been addressed, where losing the court case is the most central aspect.

Extract 4

- (4) In the end, we lost the court case, which was deeply upsetting to our lawyer, because lawyers like to win their cases and then retire to their studies, but the loss was very well received by the thousands who signed those petitions.

In this example, the company is discussing a court case they were involved in, regarding a lawsuit against a company called Glebe Farm on copyright infringement. In general, it is likely commonly agreed that a court case is a serious subject usually dealt with and addressed in a rather serious and subtle tone. Here, the facetious attitude is conveyed with the combination of the serious subject at hand (the court case) and a secondary, humoristic device, discussed in the paragraph about to follow.

The extract shows that the joking tone is achieved by making fun of the lawyer of the case, where a secondary humoristic technique of ridicule, in addition to the dominant technique of facetiousness, enhances the humoristic effect and its construction. Ridicule, as defined in Appendix 1 (see p. 76), typically involves verbal attacks against a person or an idea, in an attempt to cause humiliation and a contemptuous laughter (Berger, 1993, p. 48). The ridicule in this case is what Berger (1993, p. 48) calls a form of *deriding ridicule*, where someone is attacked with a scornful tone. Here, the lawyer and their profession are ridiculed by them losing one of their cases and retiring to their studies thereafter. The attention of the audience is drawn from the serious subject to ridiculing the lawyer taking part in the court case. Doing this, a serious matter is turned into something that may cause a reaction of laughter in the audience due to the joking, ridiculing tone.

However, a more serious stance on the extract could be taken, as well. According to Langham (2018, p. 184), transparency, honesty, and accuracy in times of crisis are some of the most crucial communicational elements executed by an organization to preserve organizational reputation. In Extract 4, these elements are visible in the way the company admits their loss of the court case, creating a feeling of transparency and honesty towards its stakeholders. On the other hand, it is probable that the result of the case has been published in the media, too, and therefore it would be incongruous of Oatly to deny the situation at hand. Still, it is often the case that the first response to a clear issue or crisis is to contradict it or to cover up the mistake, as has been found out by Langham (2018, p. 184). Taking this into consideration, it may be that mentioning the loss of the case already in the beginning of the statement has been a conscious choice, compared to the otherwise light-hearted tone and approach to the occurrence.

6.1.4 Wordplay and puns

The extracts about to follow present how wordplay and puns have been used by Oatly in their crisis response and in addressing the specific scandals at hand. What was

discussed before is that wordplays and puns can sort into multiple categories, a theme which resulted as prominent in my data set, too.

The findings from the analysis suggest that Oatly utilizes a variety of different word-play techniques to achieve the humoristic effect to emerge in their audience. This has been achieved mostly through the categories of homophones, homonymies, and through play on paronymy (Thaler, 2016, pp. 52-56; see section 3.2.1.). Extract 5 and Figure 4 further illustrate the application of each of these three (3) categories in the data, and how humour is built by them in differing ways. Extract 5 below demonstrates Oatly's creative capacities in using language to create amusement and achieve a humoristic reaction through a pun, which is one of the main functions of wordplay as reasoned by Thaler (2016, p. 51).

Extract 5.

- (5) It's not that these critics were anti-pig, they were anti-eating pigs, which is a completely valid stance and one shared by many of our loyal consumers and employees.

The extract has been taken from one of the subpages of the campaign website discussed above, where a boycott was posed against Oatly in relation to the sales of their oat waste to pig farms to feed the pigs (Residue Ruckus, n.d.). This structure and the use of the word "pig" provide insights into the way that the company utilizes two, contradictory meanings of a single word spelled and pronounced in a similar manner to form a pun.

Within this sequence, the single word "pig" has been applied twice with the same phonetical and lexical structure, but different meaning. What this means in practice is that the two appearances of the word are both pronounced in the same way (i.e., phonetical structure) (Crystal, 2008, p. 363), and that they share an identical word form (i.e., lexical structure) (Thaler, 2016, p. 55). However, there are two or more, potential definitions for the word that constructs the pun (Berger, 2011, p. 26). Thus, the

sequence fits into the wordplay categories of homonymy and homoeponic play, conceptualized by phonetic and lexical similarities of words where these words, however, are applied to convey two different meanings and therefore serve multiple, non-identical purposes (Thaler, 2016, pp. 52-55).

To demonstrate this, in this instance, Oatly refers to its critics, i.e., the stakeholders behind the boycott, as “anti-pig” and as “anti-eating pigs”. Considering the context of the crisis as dealing with pig farms, where the critics protested the sales of the oat waste as pig food, the first utterance (anti-pig) is likely to refer only to the animals. Here, the critics are portrayed as opposed to pigs, as the people taking part in the boycott did not want Oatly to feed pigs with the residue. Later in the sequence the critics are referred to as “anti-eating pigs”, changing the meaning of the word *pig* to insult the audience by calling them pigs that do not eat. As a result, two, distinct meanings of the word *pig* have been created, where the play with their difference is what creates the pun and the humour as found by Mikics (2007, p. 87). The insult, then, might have been used as they often involve fierce comparisons (Berger, 2011, p. 26). Oatly may have seen a chance in this as the crisis dealt with pigs in the first place, which can be effortless to turn into an insult. Wordplay, by itself, is often used to ridicule and embarrass people and particularly the members of an out-group (Thaler, 2016, p. 51), where embarrassing and ridiculing the critics by calling them pigs may, in this situation, cast contemptuous laughter in others, as proposed by Berger (2011, p. 37; Appendix 1, p. 76).

In Figure 4, the use of wordplay is also visible to achieve humour but, in this case, it is transmitted using a paronymy, i.e., words that are similar in their form but not identical, alike in homophones and homonymies (Thaler, 2016, p. 56).



Figure 4: Title and hyperlink to one of the crisis events (Retrieved from <https://fckoatly.com/tik-toxic> 8 April 2024).

Similarly to Figure 3 (see section 6.1.1. *Allusion*), Figure 4 above acts as a hyperlink, where clicking on it leads the visitor to an individual subpage. On this page, the company criticizes the algorithm of the popular social media platform TikTok and addresses the issue and crisis with people falsely condemning Oatly's ingredients in their own social media posts, which Oatly has later responded to.

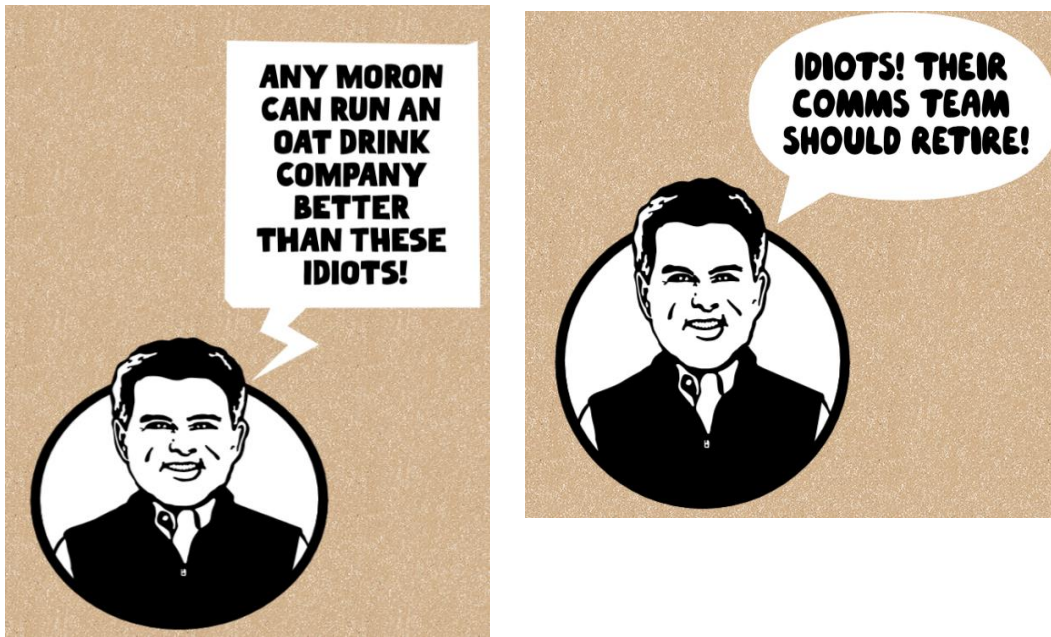
In this instance, wordplay is created by playing with the name of the social media platform TikTok, and by replacing it with the modification Tik-Toxic. The latter utterances *toxic* is relatively similar to the original suffix *tok* with its form. The beginning of the word *toxic* is pronounced similarly to *tok*, although the ending of it differs in form. Oatly might have used this specific adjective to refer to the toxicity of the social media platform and the people slamming their ingredients on the app, which has been conveyed to the audience using paronymy. This, again, shows how Oatly is able to use language creatively in their crisis response and amuse the visitors in the process, which is why wordplays are often used (Thaler, 2016, p. 51). As humour is commonly

linked to the emotion of amusement and the proneness to laugh as a response to the feeling (Warren & McGraw, 2016, p. 407), playing with words has likely been a conscious choice to achieve a humorous tone.

6.1.5 Insults

In this category, the instances of insults as the dominant humour mechanism on the website are covered. However, what I have found is that, in most cases, insults on the website act as the secondary technique, and few instances of it as the main device at play to generate humour were found. This was embodied in the analysis chapter covering the application of wordplays and puns on the website (see pp. 56-57), for example, where wordplay acted as the dominant technique and insults as the secondary. This may be the case since, as according to Berger (2011, p. 26), insults need to be combined with other humoristic techniques to accomplish a humoristic reaction. Therefore, they seem to, in this case of crisis communication, mostly cluster into the category of the secondary technique at play when combined with other ones.

Even though insults were found to appear as the dominant technique of humour only in a couple of instances, there were several interesting findings about the presentation of this device. The device was found to manifest in the speech of a character or customer servant appearing throughout the F*ck Oatly website, which was not identified as a way of conveying humour in other studies consulted for the thesis. Moreover, the insults seemed to be targeted at the company itself. Where the insults here may be analyzed as instances of self-deprecation by some, as the insults are targeted at the company behind the website in which they appear, the use of an independent character to convey them makes it a tricky and unique issue.



Figures 5 and 6: Examples of insults from the F*ck Oatly website (Retrieved from <https://fckoatly.com/> 10 April 2024).

Figures 5 and 6 show two screenshots captured from different sections of the website. In these figures, the use of insults and verbal aggression against the company has been achieved through the similar word choice *idiots*. It is evident that these instances are targeting the company and not any other party, as a reference to their communication team and the oat drink company (i.e., Oatly) exists in both statements. These cases can be characterized as paradigmatic insults as reported by Daly et al. (2018, p. 512) as intentional actions causing offense in their targets, such as calling someone stupid. On the other hand, as they are reversed and directed at the company itself instead of other parties they could, in addition, be understood as yielding victim humour, as classified by Berger (2011, p. 26), where Oatly sheds shame, embarrassment, and ridicule on themselves. Using victim humour and dissing themselves through an outside character may be a way for Oatly to cope with the crises and to lower the barriers between themselves, their audience, and the critics by consciously putting the shame on themselves.

As noted previously, insults are not humorous on their own but, to generate humour, they need to benefit from the simultaneous application of other devices. Besides, a play frame that makes the audience know that the insults are tied to a certain role or as part of a certain act needs to be established (Berger, 2011, p. 26). In this case, both aspects for the insults to emerge a humoristic reaction in the audience have been covered through the secondary device of allusion at play in the figures above. On the website, the insults targeted at Oatly are tied to the male character in the bottom left of the website, as seen in Figures 5 and 6. The character follows the visitor throughout every section of the site with different comments showing up, not all of them having to do with insults. Interestingly, the identity of this character is not revealed at any point, creating an allusion and indirect reference to a character that may be understood only by some visitors. What is more, it establishes a play frame, where the insults are tied to this specific character and their role in leading the visitor throughout the website and with their repetitive, even annoying comments going on.

It may be that this character as well as the allusion and play frame created by it are enough to evoke laughter in the audience. With their facial expressions and varying comments through the F*ck Oatly website, the character might be perceived to have their own personality that they apply for insulting purposes, too. Utilizing this role, Oatly establishes a comic play frame through which they can insult themselves without the fear of the audience taking it too seriously, which is one of the key elements of comic insults (Berger, 2011, p. 26). However, it may be that there is a specific person that Oatly is referring to with this character that is not explicitly stated. Unfolding this indirect reference (i.e., the allusion), may enhance the humoristic effect or be crucial for the emergence of laughter.

6.1.6 Self-deprecation

The phenomenon of self-deprecation was shown on the website five (5) times in total. Interestingly, it was found that all the instances of the aspirations to use oneself as the target of a joke and to share laughter by self-targeting one's own vulnerabilities in an

affiliative manner (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 780; Lee et al., 2015, p. 1186) clustered into the same categories found by Andeweg et al. (2011) in their study of self-deprecation. These categories, as illustrated in section 3.2.1. *Techniques of humour applied in the analysis*, consist of humour targeted at personal characteristics and faults, professional life, and socio-logical in-group or profession. This part of the analysis, as well as the extracts captured from the website, follow the structure of these individual categories. Here, the division will be referred to as *personal*, *professional*, and *profession* humour for clarity.

First, the category of personal humour will be covered. In this category, as discussed earlier, the focus is on targeting personal characteristics and faults that, referring to the findings and instances by Andeweg et al. (2011, p. 761), can be linked to various characteristics including numerical estimation and making fun of one's pronunciation or current state, such as being sober. Notably, the extract below highlights similar findings from the F*ck Oatly website.

Extract 6. The Daddy Issues (<https://fckoatly.com/the-daddy-issues>)

(6) But then there were the others... the ones who reached out to the advertising watchdog ASA, and apparently filed over 140 complaints. If we're being honest, we're not sure if 140 is a lot (or accurate), but it's three digits, so it feels kinda big.

In this example, the relevant aspect in relation to self-deprecation is the matter of numerical estimation, in line with the study of Andeweg et al. (2011). Markedly, the inadequacy of Oatly in evaluating the significance of the exact number of 140 complaints received about the "Help Dad" advertising campaign is what generates the humour. By reporting their uncertainty about if the number of accusations against them is a lot or even accurate, Oatly fakes a subordinate personality trait of being incapable of numerical evaluation. This has been previously mentioned as one of the interactional functions of self-deprecating humour (Speer, 2019, p. 808) as a leveling mechanism

between an individual with a high role (i.e., the leading oat-drink manufacturer Oatly), and their critics (Stewart, 2011, p. 204).

This extract indicates the function of the previously introduced theory of humour construction, the superiority theory, and how the humorous effect here is built by the combination of faking inferior traits and the feeling of superiority that emerges in the audience while doing so. The self-deprecating language here builds the crisis response by lowering barriers between the company and the publics and the potential reaction in the audience from Oatly attempting to save their face after receiving several complaints. In contrast to this, as a result of faking these lower traits and personal capabilities, laughter and thus one kind of a humoristic reaction can evoke among the audience as they sense a feeling of superiority towards the company and their behavioral faults (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352).

In the next example, the humour created through self-deprecation belongs into the higher category of poking fun at the professional life of oneself. This category can cluster into ridiculing and generating fun out of one's professional life in relation to its impacts on their daily life, such as losing sleep, or financial problems. Moreover, it can link to certain aspects of space, such as one's office (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 761). These features of self-deprecation are illustrated in Extract 7, below.

Extract 7. Tik-Toxic (<https://fckoatly.com/tik-toxic>)

(7) Sometimes in the dead of night, a Swedish community manager from Oatly will wake up in a cold sweat, muttering phrases like, “Non-GMO, expeller-pressed rapeseed oil” or “it’s maltose from our enzymatic production process.”

The community manager’s partner will hug the troubled soul and say something like, “Honey! It’s okay! It was just a dream.” To which the community manager will reply, “But was it?”

This example represents a relationship between the professional life of a community manager from Oatly and their sleep at night, where humour is poked at them by

implicitly showing that their professional life is affecting their dreams and ability to sleep. The assumption here is that the community manager here refers to the staff member from Oatly navigating them through the crisis, crafting answers to the social media releases about the company that led them to the crisis in the first place.

The emphasis in this extract is on the creation of humour through embarrassment. This is reinforced by the application of a personal narrative in this specific setting where the community manager is, in the extract above, presented as waking up in a cold sweat, muttering, and referred to with the metaphor *troubled soul*. This way, the staff member is placed in embarrassing circumstances and context, created through the personal narrative and figurative language. Berger (1993, p. 33) refers to embarrassment as its individual technique of humour, where the features of making the target of the joke or narrative disturbingly self-conscious and ashamed are in the center. This secondary technique of humour has been applied by Oatly in the extract above to disparage and embarrass themselves and their community manager. In this situation, the humour and laughter can be conveyed by the audience sensing a feeling of superiority towards the community manager being embarrassed. Thus, this extract, similarly to Extract 6, follows the principles of the superiority theory.

The last extract depicts the last category of self-deprecation covered in the analysis, i.e., targeting one's position or sociological in-group (Andeweg et al., 2011, p. 761). In the examples below, the in-group identified from the data is the Oatly work community.

Extracts 8, 9 & 10. The Daddy Issues (<https://fckoatly.com/the-daddy-issues>) & Tik-Toxic (<https://fckoatly.com/tik-toxic>)

- (8) Oatly advertisements are sort of like abstract art. Not because they're made by people who failed out of art school and had to go into advertising – which is true for half of us – but because everyone interprets them a bit differently.

(9) We thought about having our very smart – but very nerdy – food scientists answer all this hate with TikToks of their own.

(10) But if you're not in the mood for boring information from highly-educated Oatly nerds, scroll down for the much-more-entertaining Tweets and TikToks keeping our community managers busy.

In Extracts 8, 9, and 10, a prominent theme is the disparaging of the company as an entity, and particularly the staff members of Oatly. In contrast to the other extracts of self-deprecation, these three instances notably highlight the specific in-group the disparaging comments are targeting. This supports the point by Andeweg et al. (2011, p. 760) as they state that self-deprecating humour relies on an in-group's perceived shortcomings, dealing with social, behavioral, and physical elements. In this case, the flaws draw on aspects having to do with personality traits of the community (nerdy), and topics of education and work. Lowering their status by such self-deprecation builds another chance for the sense of superiority in the target audience.

6.2 Concluding remarks

The comic elements were identified nearly from every section on the campaign website, where the techniques of *allusion*, *definition*, *facetiousness*, *wordplay* and *puns*, *insults*, and *self-deprecation* stood out as the most prevalent and fruitful ones. The findings of the most frequent humour techniques were found to be mostly contradictory to those identified in the studies by Juckel et al. (2016), and Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004). Their similar studies suggested that the most common devices in sitcoms and television commercials included humour such as slapstick, irony, repartee, parody, and misunderstanding (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 147; Juckel et al., 2016, p. 589). This divergence shows the need for humour studies in those fields that have not been explored to a large extent before, as the typologies developed for each set of data differentiated significantly from one another. Only the techniques of allusion, self-deprecation, and puns were in line with these two earlier studies that additionally relied on

the typology created by Berger (1993). This may indicate that they are those kinds of humour techniques that can be used to generate humour across various genres and situations.

The humorous effect that was constructed by Oatly in their crisis communication was found to be a mix of different aspects. First and foremost, the humoristic effect was heavily shaped by the application of incongruous elements, deviating from the common norms of reality or society. This did not come as a surprise as, as discussed by Juckel et al. (2016, pp. 598-599), the incongruity theory of humour is considered as the most significant and influential one, especially in the comic techniques relying on the play with language, alike in the present study. In a way, the website was identified as a single instance of incongruity, where the approach to crisis events in a humorous tone violated the commonly understood patterns (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352) and how crises are mostly addressed in a rather serious tone. The analysis found that the incongruous language constructed significantly by the application of humour techniques such as *definition* and *facetiousness*, where the humorous reaction to them is reasoned with the suggestion that people laugh at language and things that confound and surprise them (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352).

What is more, in terms of the humour theories discussed earlier, the humour was found to construct through the feeling of superiority, too. In relation to this finding, it was detected that Oatly ridiculed themselves with the help of devices such as *self-deprecation*, *insults* and *allusion*, perhaps in order to lower the barriers to their stakeholders in times of crisis and to evoke laughter at their actions. This is at the heart of the superiority theory, as the foolishness of others and ridiculing other people is often a necessary element in casting laughter, and for someone to seem humorous (Lintott, 2016, p. 348).

The construction of the comic effect was noted to emerge from the combination of different humour techniques and categories. The analysis was led by the humour techniques that were found to be the most dominant devices at play in the chosen extract.

However, the analysis additionally yielded several examples where other, secondary techniques were added by Oatly to enhance the emergence of humour in the visitors of the website. Interestingly, some of these combined devices such as embarrassment and analogies and/or metaphors were found to cluster into the humour categories of logic and identity too, as according to Berger (1993) (see p. 17 for more information). Furthermore, the verbal extracts were, in some cases, accompanied by visual factors such as different font sizes and characters to enhance the humorous message. This exemplifies the point made by Berger (2011, p. 4), as humour techniques are oftentimes found in consolidation and some techniques may not, by themselves, be enough to generate humour. Here, we can see how Oatly has attempted to make their website to appear humorous, as the techniques had often been combined with one another where the appearance of some techniques only by themselves would not be as humorous. On the contrary, some of the techniques were additionally found to appear only by themselves without unifying with other humour devices, where allusions and word-plays are a great example of such situations from the piece of data.

Overall, the analysis and the findings propose that the F*ck Oatly website in focus contains versatile kinds of humour. Therefore, it needs to be considered that companies may, in some circumstances, apply humour as their strategy and response in times of crisis. In respect to the different choices made in the application of the humour techniques identified from the website, as well as their participation in the establishment of the humorous effect according to previous research, it can be proposed that the use of these mechanisms might have been a conscious choice by Oatly to build a humoristic crisis response.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the prevalence of humour in the context of crisis communication. This was achieved by approaching a website launched by the Swedish oat-drink manufacturer Oatly, F*ck Oatly, detailing the crises and scandals faced by the company over the years. Moreover, the study strived to connect the kinds of humour techniques identified from the website with their involvement in the construction of the humorous effect in the audience.

The research questions set up for the study were the following:

1. Which techniques of humour manifest in the crisis communication website by Oatly?
2. How is the humorous effect constructed through these techniques?

In order to answer the first research question, the principles of inductive qualitative content analysis were applied, following the guidelines of the method by Krippendorff (2019), Weber (1990) and Schreier (2012). After the inductive analysis, an applicable framework to code the findings was researched, where Berger's (1993) *Typology of humour* glossary turned out to be the most suitable one regarding the preliminary discoveries. Moreover, the typology was strengthened with the support of the works of other scholars in the field, both due to the fulfillment of the purposes of the study and the old age of, as well as criticism towards Berger's (1993) framework. Berger's (1993) glossary and the contribution of other research in its extension to better understand the prominent techniques of humour on the website resulted in an original typology for the context of crisis communication that can also be tested by future research in a similar field.

As expected, humour seemed to be a central factor in the construction of Oatly's crisis response, where the individual techniques divided into dominant and secondary

devices on the website as originally proposed by Berger (1993). The dominant techniques of humour identified from the F*ck Oatly website consisted of humoristic allusions, definitions, facetiousness, wordplay and puns, insults, and self-deprecation (see 3.2.1. *Techniques of humour applied in the analysis*, pp. 19-27). Furthermore, it was found that the ways in which the humour and crisis response were constructed with the support of these six (6) techniques additionally varied in their application.

To illustrate this, although the analysis was led by the six (6) most dominant humour techniques mentioned above, a lot of variation was found in the ways of constructing humour even within a single, higher device, and not only between these six techniques chosen for the analysis. For instance, allusions were identified from the website both in the form of sexual allusions, i.e., implicit references to sexuality, and as references to famous literary texts. In respect to wordplays, on the contrary, play with words seemed to appear in versatile different forms, including homophones, homonymies, and paronyms, all of which use language and construct humour a bit differently. This is consistent with previous research in the field of humour studies, as Buijzen and Valkenburg (2009) additionally found that the different categories and techniques of humour in commercials also included smaller, individual components that stacked under the higher categories. Therefore, although the crisis response can, on one hand, be understood to construct through the six higher techniques of humour, these devices additionally included differing features inside the individual techniques that must be considered to fully understand the humour construction.

Although the main focus of the present study was on the verbal construction of humour and that the dominant techniques clustered into this category, some secondary devices were found in combination with the dominant ones, aligning with Berger's (1993) framework. On this dimension, the results demonstrated secondary application of devices such as embarrassment, ridicule, analogies and metaphors that both belonged into the main humour categories of logic and identity, as created by Berger (1993), where the humour is ideational or existential. Based on these findings, it can

be concluded that the humour construction in the crisis response is a sum of different factors and elements. Furthermore, the secondary techniques were often found to apply in those contexts in which the dominant ones would not have been enough to evoke humour.

To answer the second research question, there were several aspects that contributed to the construction of the humorous effect in the crisis communication process. For example, it was found that the humour construction was often a combination of the use of nonserious, frivolous, and joking tones of voice in serious situations and in relation to sensitive topics on the website which, referring to Wilkins & Eisenbraun (2009, p. 352) are often enough to evoke laughter in the audience. Utilizing this tone of voice, it seems that Oatly was aiming to break the norms of reality and crisis communication as it is commonly understood to produce comedy. They seemed to draw attention to their foolishness by ridiculing and embarrassing themselves in the eyes of their stakeholders, where these are considered as some of the main elements of something humorous (Lintott, 2016, p. 348). In some cases, the ridicule was targeted to their critics, too. Lastly, the construction of humour was noticed to emerge from the layering of different humour techniques and types to enhance the reaction in those cases that the individual techniques may not have been enough. Interestingly, some of the humour was also perceived to be targeted to a specific audience group, where it required some specific, background knowledge to be unfolded.

Most of the previous studies in the field focus on the coverage of crisis communication and humour from the perspectives of stakeholder perception and reputation management (Hämpke et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2017), whereas the identification of humour from the processes of organizational crisis communication has remained relatively scarce. Where studies on humour types in crisis communication existed, most of them seemed to relate to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Odunlami et al., 2020), and not to crises as organizational events. The reason behind this may be that organizational crises and crisis communication are commonly conceptualized

through the threats of crises in the existence of an organization and the reduction of these, often negative impacts on organizational performance and reputation through communication. Therefore, due to these negative impacts of crises on organizational existence and the role of crisis communication in such times, the possibility of the utilization of humour in these contexts is likely to be left unconsidered, and hence might not draw research interest.

In contrast to previous research, my results indicate that organizational crisis responses can contain a great deal of humour and result in a humorous reaction or laughter in versatile ways. Although the findings of this thesis cannot be applied to generalize the types of humour in crisis times, it offers valuable and striking insights to be tested in a similar field that should not be left ignored. In regard to future research, this study and the typology of humour developed can act as a starting point for expanding the understanding of corporate communication and particularly crisis communication. My hope is that my findings will help to shift the focus of later studies in the field to cover the expression of positive emotions, in addition to those negative emotions of shame and regret that crisis communication has commonly been associated with. In addition, the results from the analysis support the relationship between Oatly and their unique and distinct style of communication as explored by scholars such as Swain (2023) and Krampe and Fridman (2021), highlighting the role of provocative and witty language-use as their trademark.

The present study, in addition to its strengths and implications for studies of humour and corporate communication, also has its limitations. As previously noted, the findings are based on my subjective experience of selected examples. Owing to this, the results are rather personal, and there may be room for misinterpretations in what has been perceived as humorous. It may be that something that was identified as an instance of a specific humour technique was not intended as anything humorous by Oatly. However, it should be questioned if it is even possible, by any means, to achieve completely objective results when studying humour, without the probability of the

analysis being biased by one's own, subjective experience. In addition, the glossary of humour by Berger (1993) that was applied as the core framework is several decades old that questions the reliability of my insights to this date, although an original typology for the purposes of the current study was created with the support of other existing research. On the other hand, by extending Berger's (1993) typology with the help of other more contemporary research and by criticizing the old glossary throughout the thesis, the aspect of reliability was thoroughly taken into consideration and not ignored. Lastly, the aspect of reliability may also be challenged by little previous research in the field of individual humour techniques and their identification that forced me to rely on sources such as dictionaries from time to time. However, I attempted to rely on dictionaries mostly in those cases in which I defined some well-known and less central concepts and leave them out when discussing more central terms, whenever it was possible to define them based on academic sources.

What comes to future research, the topic of crisis communication and humour together could be broadened by applying the typology developed in this study in other instances of crisis communication. This could be done to see if these techniques can be generalized in the field of humoristic crisis responses, or if it is unique for this particular study. Furthermore, future frameworks could be accompanied by the investigation of stakeholder perception in relation to the F*ck Oatly website, and whether the application of the identified techniques results in negative or positive emotions in the audience in relation to the organization and their response. In general, as the field still remains relatively unexplored, even with the contribution of this study, the possibilities for future studies to be conducted on a similar theme are limitless and fruitful.

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9 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1

Berger's (1993) Categories and Techniques of Humour: Short definitions

Language	Logic	Identity	Action
Allusion	Absurdity	Before/After	Chase
Bombast	Accident	Burlesque	Slapstick
Definition	Analogy	Caricature	Speed
Exaggeration	Catalogue	Eccentricity	Time
Facetiousness	Coincidence	Embarrassment	
Insults	Disappointment	Exposure	
Infantilism	Ignorance	Grotesque	
Irony	Mistakes	Imitation	
Misunderstanding	Repetition	Impersonation	
Over literalness	Reversal	Mimicry	
Puns, Word Play	Rigidity	Parody	
Repartee	Theme/Variation	Scale	
Ridicule		Stereotype	
Sarcasm		Unmasking	
Satire			

Figure 7: Categories and Techniques of Humour as according to Berger (1993, p. 18).

Language

Allusion

According to Berger (1993, p. 21), allusions link with errors, mistakes and things that people say, becoming known for a certain reason. The key feature of allusions is that they relate to information that people have, dealing with sexuality, personality,

characteristics of behavior, and other embarrassing matters. The allusion and the reference may not be understood by every audience, which can lead to missed humour.

Bombast

Berger (1993, p. 25) explains the main characteristics of bombast with an infantile kind of humour or gibberish, where the gibberish carries a meaning, or has been developed into something meaningful. In bombast, the exaggeration and tone of expression makes the joking sensibility clear.

Definition

Humoristic definitions involve a hint of trickery in a way the audience finds the humoristic definitions light or eccentric, where most expect definitions to be approached in a serious manner (Berger, 1993, p. 30). The use of definitions gives their user a sense of power, enabling an easy application of other humoristic techniques at the same time.

Exaggeration

Exaggeration, as a humour technique, must be combined with other devices for them to be interpreted as humorous. Exaggerations blow things up beyond reality for comic effect and can also be reversed as a humoristic understatement (Berger, 2011, p. 18).

Facetiousness

Facetiousness can be understood as a nonserious, joking tone of voice and the use of language in a serious situation to achieve a comic effect (Berger, 1993, p. 35).

Insults

Insults, in general, are quite self-explanatory. Where most techniques in humour consist of masked hostility and aggression, in insults these feelings are made visible and not hidden. In humour, insults need to be combined with other techniques or apply a play frame to achieve a comic effect (Berger, 1993, p. 40).

Infantilism

Infantilism, referring to Berger's (1993, p. 39) definition, involves the play with words for comic effect, where words and sounds are manipulated in a way that sounds like the speech and the language use of children. Infantilism can be differentiated from puns and other kinds of wordplay in a way that good puns, for instance, additionally involve meaning, where infantilism does not (Berger, 1993, p. 39).

Irony

In irony, the humoristic effect stems from the difference between what has been said, and what is actually meant. Irony manifests in versatile ways, but often it involves stating something, but meaning the opposite. Alternatively, it can take place as dramatic irony, where specific characters believe the opposite than what is the reality or act in a way that is different from what they intended or desired (Berger, 1993, p. 40).

Misunderstanding

As suggested by Berger (1993, p. 43), misunderstandings in humour is tied to the strange meanings created by language without context, or when withdrawn out of their context. Therefore, it is centrally linked to the ambiguity of language.

Over literalness

Over literalness refers to the inability of an agent to take certain circumstances into consideration and interpret a request in a way that is reasonable. In over literalness, the aspects of stupidity and misunderstanding, as well as the mechanicalness of one's behavior creates the humoristic reaction (Berger, 1993, p. 41).

Puns, Wordplay

Puns and wordplay include a clever use of language to evoke a humoristic reaction where, in good puns, a play with meaning exists, where bad puns solely play on sounds. Puns are signifiers that link with two or more signifieds (Berger, 1993, p. 45),

meaning that a certain word can carry multiple meanings, which is then used to generate humour.

Repartee

In repartee, the main function is to reply to a specific insult with a better one, or facing aggression targeted at one with more aggression. These consist of witty or amusing responses which must be made right away for it to be connected with wit (Berger, 1993, p. 45).

Ridicule

Ridicule includes a verbal attack against an idea, a thing, or a person to cause humiliation and a contemptuous form of laughter (Berger, 1993, p. 48).

Sarcasm

Sarcastic humour involves the use of contemptuous, cutting and biting remarks, delivered in a hostile way. For some, sarcasm is embedded in their daily use of language and as the manner they deal with people on the daily basis, where its use may end up risky unless it is targeted against its user themselves, or turned into victim humour. In sarcasm, the tone of voice and the manner in which the message is of high importance, where the use of sarcastic language instead of being serious needs to be visible (Berger, 1993, p. 49).

Satire

Satire can be understood as one of the general techniques of humour, which includes a multitude of the techniques included in Berger's (1993) typology, such as exaggeration and insults. In satire, its user attack or go against institutions or certain individuals, acting as a way of showing resistance and attacking the status quo (Berger, 1993, p. 49).

Logic

Absurdity

Absurdity involves forms of confusion and nonsense, where the effects of its use may be complicated, where it plays with aspects of logic and rationality as they are commonly understood. (Berger, 1993, p. 19).

Accident

Accident, as a form of humour, emerges from events such as slips of the tongue, typos, ambiguous construction of sentences, however distinct from mistakes and errors (Berger, 1993, p. 20).

Analogy

Analogies are based on invidious comparisons, where an elaborate metaphor is created with uniting incongruous elements with one another, in which a humorous aspect to the comparison exists (Berger, 1993, pp. 22-23).

Catalogue

Catalogue is one of the standard techniques of humor, where the application of different incongruities (e.g., funny names and nonsense) is enabled by hiding them in sort of a catalogue (Berger, 1993, p. 27). This catalogue plays with different sounds and words with the aim of it ending up as incongruous for a comic effect, where the logic of the list is traduced.

Coincidence

Coincidences are mainly based on the feeling of embarrassment, where particular circumstances lead one in awkward situations. In coincidences, the humour can be created either solely by these situations and embarrassment on an individual, or it can proceed with an escape from the embarrassment caused by it (Berger, 1993, p. 29).

Disappointment

Disappointments, in comic, lead the audience on about a certain thing, and then denying the logical consequences expected by them. For disappointments to be funny, the frame or situation in which the disappointment occurs needs to be considered, where the disappointment itself needs to be minor, too (Berger, 1993, p. 31).

Ignorance

Ignorance as a device is firmly related to the humorous mechanisms of exposure and embarrassment, where in ignorance a feeling of superiority is achieved when the ignorance of a certain person is revealed (Berger, 1993, p. 36).

Mistakes

Based on Berger's (1993, p. 42) understanding, mistakes for comic purposes relate to some type of an error, poor judgement, ignorance, or inattention towards one. People, in these circumstances, laugh at the lack of knowledge of the person making a certain mistake.

Repetition

The humoristic effect of a repetition, according to Berger (1993, p. 46) stems from a kind of a continuum or series being established, in which cases there is a tension on whether this continuum will be able to carry on, or whether a variation in it will take place.

Reversal

Reversal, as one of the most common techniques in humour, gives away some of the absurd features of life, offering insights on them that are often somewhat profound or amusing (Berger, 1993, p. 47).

Rigidity

As defined by Berger (1993, p. 48), rigidity is a type of over literalness, where the humour is rather based on actional and behavioral elements, such as single-mindedness or one's inability to react to circumstances.

Theme / Variation

Theme and variation are devices that must, similarly to some other, aforementioned techniques, be combined with other techniques to be effective in terms of humour. Using variations on a theme makes appeals to the general logic and understanding, in which the relativity of things is in the heart of this mechanism (Berger, 1993, p. 54).

Identity

Before / After

This technique is the most common in plays and movies, in showing a character's ability to transform themselves. Sometimes, the change itself can be what creates the humour, but it is commonly contrasted with the rigidity or sameness of those about them or their mechanicalness (Berger, 1993, p. 23).

Burlesque

Burlesque is used as a generic concept for all literary forms in which actions or people are ridiculed by imitation, where parody and caricature, as their separate techniques, are used as names for different forms of burlesque instead (Berger, 1993, p. 25).

Caricature

Caricature is based on ideas of comparison and contrast, where a grotesque representation of a person is created through exaggeration of their features and a retention of likeness (Berger, 1993, p. 26).

Eccentricity

The humour in this device is based on the deviation between what people are used to or what is generally understood as 'normal', and what people find when they experience the deviant. The humour in eccentricity and the abnormal elements plays with the common sense of logic and the common ways of thinking and behaving (Berger, 1993, p. 32).

Embarrassment

Embarrassment consists of making one uncomfortably self-conscious about themselves, confused, and ashamed for comic effect. Embarrassments are linked to the superiority theory, where people feel superior to the one being embarrassed (Berger, 1993, p. 33).

Exposure

Exposure involves the exposure of hidden features of a person, where the hidden qualities need to be under the surface, in a way that the character in the humoristic story is not aware of it, for it to count as an exposure. Otherwise, the device would count as unmasking instead (Berger, 1993, p. 34).

Grotesque

The impact of grotesques can be either comic or terrifying. The humoristic effect is generated while people maintain an aspect of psychological distance or uninvolvement, where a comic play frame has been developed, conditioning the ways in which people respond to this technique (Berger, 1993, p. 36).

Imitation

What happens in imitation is a person pretending to be something or someone else, such as a machine or an animal, but maintaining their own identity in the process of doing so. This is then merged with the thing that one is imitating. This technique differs from impersonation, another device of humour, in a sense that in impersonation, the identity of one is simultaneously changed (Berger, 1993, p. 37).

Impersonation

In impersonation, a person's identity is being stolen from them and often yielded to various forms for humoristic degradation. In impersonation, a feeling of tension develops in whether the person impersonated is going to end up getting their identity back or not (Berger, 1993, p. 38).

Mimicry

Based on Berger's (1993, p. 42) understanding, mimicry is a type of humour in which a person maintains their own identity while stealing or borrowing the identity of others at the same time. Mimicry, alike other techniques, benefits from other humour techniques for comic purposes.

Parody

This technique includes ridiculing some well-known writer or other actor, specifically their style and mannerisms, through verbal mimicry or imitation (Berger, 1993, p. 44).

Scale

As explained in Berger's (1993, p. 50) work, the incongruity and humoristic impact of scales is created through large-sized, or very small objects. The incongruous features relate to people expecting a normal size object, such as a mouse, and getting something unusual in return, such as a tiny mouse, or a gigantic one (Berger, 1993, p. 50).

Stereotype

Humoristic aspects involving stereotypes can be defined as insults and attacks on races, ethnic groups, where there is more to the comic of stereotypes than this. Stereotypes are beneficial to comedians as they can act as explanations of behavior, and allow individuals to understand motivation (Berger, 1993, p. 52).

Unmasking

Unmasking emphasizes the process and effects of discovering something, and revealing something in this technique commonly leads to humiliation or embarrassment (Berger, 1993, p. 54). Alike other similar techniques (i.e., imitation, mimicry and impersonation), a tension exists between the mask and what is revealed at the end.

Action

Chase

Using an example as a definition of chase, it is a person trying to avoid being humiliated or punished in some, decided way. Mainly, the humour in chase scenes in humour, as an example, comes from seeing an individual getting chased, and them using their ingenuity in the process (Berger, 1993, p. 28).

Slapstick

Slapsticks use physical actions to create humour and amuse the audience and can involve events such as people getting pies thrown in their faces, in which a person is objectified as a form of insult (Berger, 1993, p. 51).

Speed

Speed, as it is commonly understood, can be turned into something funny to achieve a comic effect. This can be achieved, for example, by speeding up the action in chase scenes, where the people being chased is running at impossible and incredible speeds (Berger, 1993, p. 52). The humour behind speed might, however, be different to explain and grasp in some cases.

Time

No available definition in Berger's (1993; 2011) works.

9.2 Appendix 2

Email response from Oatly: Permission to apply screenshots from the website in the present study

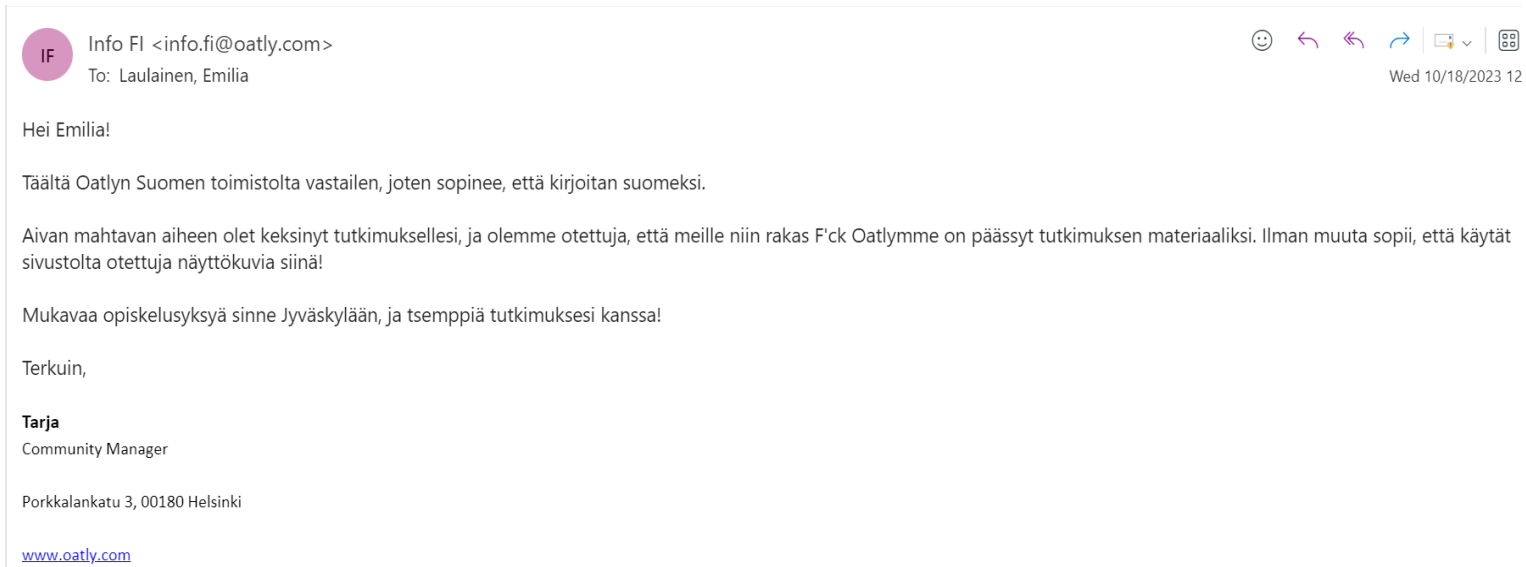


Figure 8: The permission email received from Oatly

